HERSELF HIMSELF AND MYSELF

RUTH SAWYER

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RUTH SAWYER

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THE PRIMROSE RING. Illustrated.
SEVEN MILES TO ARDEN. Frontispiece.
THIS WAY TO CHRISTMAS. Frontispiece.
A CHILD'S YEAR-BOOK. Illustrated by the Author.

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[Established 1817]

We chatted away the dusk hour—of fairies and charms and things of equally airy substance, there among the roses, drinking our tea

Herself Himself & Myself

A Romance by

RUTH SAWYER
AUTHOR OF
The Primrose Ring, etc.

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HERSELF, HIMSELF, AND MYSELF

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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Beginning with Myself	1
II.	Herself Makes the Full of an Empty Heart and Myself Brings Back the Thorn Bloom	17
III.	As in the Old Tale—the Castle is Destroyed	42
IV.	The King's Daughter and the Swineherd's Wife Go Adventuring	68
V.	More Adventuring	98
VI.	The Childeen Steals Out as the Woman Creeps Into the Dun	118
VII.	Aunt's Tossing of Cups Comes True and We Cross the Water	147
VIII.	Herself Lays Foot to the Hungry Grass	177
IX.	Herself Finds the Open Road Again with a Lad's Help	209
X.	The Casting of the Shadow	226
XI.	Herself and Himself	246
XII.	Again I Remember the Wise Woman of Lough Erne	278

HERSELF, HIMSELF AND MYSELF

HERSELF, HIMSELF AND MYSELF

I

BEGINNING WITH MYSELF

SURE, it is not an old woman that I am and it is myself would be the last to say that old age has yet crossed my door-sill. But for all that, the feeling is strong upon me that with another rise of the hill or another turn of the road I shall be glimpsing the end of the way; and already the sayings and doings of my childhood are coming back thick and fast like homing birds —signs that old age will not be long in following after. There is no sadness in the thought, mind you. And who would be staying young always?

For the moment the memory of my young days is strong upon me while the words of the Wise

Woman of Lough Erne come back to me as if it had been yesterday they were spoken.

It is well I mind the day my mother took me, a first journey out of the county, to the fair at Enniskillen, and how she pointed me out the Wise Woman who sat on a grass mound like a Druidess in the pagan days, making her prophesies and saying the wise things, a great crowd about her. We dallied with the other idlers to listen; and being small, I slipped under my mother's arm through the crowd till I stood near enough to make out the pattern of the lace on the white cap she wore. Much that she said had no meaning to my ears, but this I remembered:

"'Tis the poets and *seannachies* that tell the tales of the world, but, sure, 'tis the people themselves that have the making of them. And what man or woman, tell me that, has not the makings of one tale at least to leave behind? 'Tis best remembered, this; for 'twill give ye more heart to keep your lives filled with prettiness and your hands clean of the bog-ditch."

In child fashion I wondered at the time what tale it would be my luck to make; and then and there I was for having it a tale of a king's daughter. Now with old age but a shadow's length before, I know that the tale is made and ready for telling and that there is not a king's daughter in the warp

or woof of it. Yet—if the fancy takes me—sure, why shouldn't I be telling it after the manner of such a tale?

If you hunt through the old *laoidhes* of Ireland you will find them given over for the most part to chieftains and kings' sons, for in those days it was the man who had ever the right to adventure—to seeking, and finding, and winning. But among them there is one tale of a king's daughter who goes adventuring. I mind it well. Herself was fostered by the swineherd's wife, and after her castle had been burned and her parents slain, with the swineherd's wife she went seeking her fortune.

So, she found her love instead of waiting for love to find her; and afterward. . . . But an old tongue jumps over itself, and I will be having the tale told before ever it's begun. This I would have you remembering, however, that while my dearie was never a king's daughter, nor I a swineherd's wife, nor, for that matter, was the love she found belonging to a king's son, still am I telling the tale of Herself and Himself and Myself after the fashion of the old one, with a dropping into the old speech now and again and a bit of fancy here and there to lighten up the gray of common happenings.

I was born in Donegal. I need not be telling you in what country it lies, for too many lads and

lassies have been coming here in the past fifty years bearing the stamp of that country for America to be ignorant of its place on the map. So, 'twas in Donegal I was born and raised, the child of well-to-do farmers and a descendant of the Kelleys of Connaught—as old a bardic line as you will find in the north of Ireland.

I had gentle rearing; and when I reached the proper age my mother sent me to the Sisters' School at Ballyshannon to learn lace-making, good English, and good manners, aye, and humility, along with many other things. Always I have had the notion that she hoped I might choose the sisterhood myself when the time was ripe; but she never spoke the wish if it lay in her heart, and before I was ever old enough to be a nun I was married. I married a good lad, the son of a neighboring farmer, and life promised much for us both, with love between us and the birdeen coming. But she barely lasted to see the passing of the wee feathered folk we called her brothers; and the wee grave was made in the cemetery at Killymard, cresting the sea, before the first snow fell.

Three springs came and went; though we kept the nest well lined and burned many candles to the Blessed Virgin, no other came to fill the birdeen's place. When the fourth spring came I laid

my lad beside her; and that was the first time I was remembering the words of the Wise Woman of Lough Erne as I stood looking down at the two graves—the one grassed and the one fresh made.

"Sure, where can you be finding the makings of a tale out of a love half told and a heart gone empty, Nora *mo bhron?*" I said to myself, looking up to see Doctor Danny beside me.

"Hearken to me, lass. 'Tis bad enough having the heart left empty, but 'tis worse keeping it so. Do you know what happens, even to a heart overbig like yours? Faith, it shrinks and it shrinks, a bit each year, till it's not the size of a dried husk and there's not room enough left to hold the need of a troubled soul or the cry of a child." Gently he drew me away. "Go somewhere—anywhere—where ye can fill your heart full; aye, and keep it full till the day ye are laid yonder beside your dear ones."

'Twas the true words Doctor Danny was speaking that day. I was knowing it well, for when did he ever fail a soul in need? And that night my mind was made to come over the seas and find the makings of a fresh tale in a strange country. I could never be staying there with the sight of the two graves draining my heart dry, and grow into aught but a bitter old woman. In time I packed my things and came, as many a lass has come

before me, by way of Queenstown and Ellis Island; and I went to my father's sister on the Hudson to stay until I could find employment.

What employment? That was the first question my aunt was asking me after I had landed and we had had a drinking of tea twice around. I knew then what was in her mind, she, so proud of being a Kelley of Connaught, and holding there was nothing too good for them and nothing too high for them to be looking at. I was knowing as well what she would be thinking of my answer.

"Faith, I'm going into service, Aunt," said I.

"Service!" She gasped the word back at me through the last swallows of tea, while she put down the cup without tossing the leaves—a bad sign in Aunt.

"Aye, service," I repeated the word after her. "And what's the matter with going into service?"

"The matter! Enough matter. To think I should see the day a Kelley steps down to being a common servant!" She spread her hands helplessly over her knees as if she was speaking of some poor soul about to be barred out of purgatory.

"Sure, I hope I'll be something better than that. What's the matter with being an uncommon one?"

I spoke with a light tongue, but I was hot inside with all this foolish talk about going into

service, as if it were near being a crime against one's decency and self-respect.

The thought took me then as it has many the time since—who does not go into service and what is life but an endless chain of each serving the one higher up? You cannot be leaving out the presidents or the kings, either; only their service comes harder and their wages more. You can say this of them all, from the man at the bottom to the man at the top: if his service is poor and not worth his wage he'll be dropped and a better man put in his place.

"Why won't you go into a shop like a sensible girl? Or what's to hinder you taking up sewing by the day? Both are respectable and suited to your birth and the good rearing you've had."

Aunt spoke with feeling, for she was a seamstress herself, with "Miss Kelley, Dressmaker," mind you, on a brass plate outside her door. Her head was held as high as any in that countryside; and she had no notion that I should be lowering it for her.

But I shook my head. "They are not taking my fancy. That's the whole why and there's naught to be said more." For wasn't I knowing full well that I could never fill my heart that way in a thousand years? And I added, as the thought came to me, "Sure, if it takes good birth and

raising to make a good seamstress, it takes the same to make a good servant; and I promise not to be shaming the name of Kelley by thinking myself above the raising of others. A nurse for young children, Aunt, that's what I have a mind to be."

She was past any answer but a long sigh. I turned to look out of the window; and that very moment Herself came down the street. She was swinging a bit of a rag doll in one hand, while with the other she was clinging to an ugly, grim-looking person of middle age. Maybe it was the woman's ugliness that made the child look so fair; maybe it was the empty-heartedness of me which made anything small and clinging seem beautiful.

This much I know—my arms were hungry for her with the first sight and I knew at the once that I wanted her. It was early summer, and her wee legs were bare down to her tumbled socks. The wrists and neck of her white dress were tied with blue ribbons; her hair showed yellow as corn under the wee white hat which was crowned with bluebells. The eyes were gray, set in dark lashes; but the cheeks were too fair and the mouth too solemn, and there was no dancing light in the eyes. I whispered to myself then, watching her come down the street:

"Sure, Nora Kelley, you could be coaxing some

thorn bloom into those cheeks, aye, and dimples cornering the mouth and laughter in the eyes. Now what better service could you be finding than that?"

But the sorriest sight of all was watching the wee bare legs break into a skip every step or two, as if the heart was hungry to be dancing, only the feet had never learnt the way.

"What's catching your eye beyond?" asked my aunt.

"Come and see," said I. "Maybe you can be telling me who the wee one is."

My aunt came, drawing her spectacles down from her forehead the better to see.

"Why, 'tis the Drene child from the great house on the hill; you can be seeing the roof from the kitchen window. They call her father the fiddling banker. The saying goes that he can make money in the stocks with the one hand while he can beat the whole world fiddling with the other. There's the one child, just."

"And who is it with her?"

"It must be the governess, then. She's a bit cross-looking to have the care of a child, don't you think, Nora?"

"Faith, I'd as soon think of fostering a wee one out with a crocodile; one's about as ugly and leathery, aye, and as human-looking as the other.

See, she has neither eye nor thought for the wee hand tugging at hers. Has the childeen no mother?"

"Who's after saying she had no mother? Sure, her mother is as fine a lady as you would find anywhere, and a good woman, and kind."

The words dropped from Aunt's tongue like so many bits of lead straight over my heart. For the hope was strong with me that I might be finding a motherless wean to nurse; and seeing the child passing by with the grim woman, the thought sprang at me that I had her found.

It might be a cruel wish that I had made—to give my services only where the need matched my own; but, sure, the world is full of motherless weans. And why should I not be going where I could find the full of my heart? Isn't the world a better place for being filled with those who are doing the work they are wishing to do instead of being choked with those that are working without heart?

I gave a last look at the back and the skipping bare legs as they turned the corner. Somehow, there was a droop to the whole wee figure—you'll see the same look to the harebells when a drought comes; and I came back to Aunt with the feeling stronger in my mind than ever.

"I'm going into service," I said again. "What's

more, I'll be keeping the name of Kelley; for I'll not be dragging along with me any memory of my own that might be casting a shadow across a nursery. Now, my mind being made, we'll have another drinking of tea, and this time you'll be tossing the cups. 'Twould be a pity, just, not to be seeing is it a fair future that I have before me."

My aunt cheered up. It is not the way of the Irish to bide down-hearted long over the one thing; and soon the cups were filled again and drained and tossed. Aunt was considered a rare hand at the fortune-telling; and she smiled in a knowledgeable way as she studied the scattering of leaves in my cup.

"There's the journey you've already taken across the water, Nora, with the safe landing which you've had. There's good prospects—aye —and more to them."

She sat silent for a space, forgetting to rock with the great curiosity; it was easy telling that the things she was seeing foretold by the leaves were as real as if they had happened long since.

"There's pleasant living in a grand house for you, Nora, and a child. You can see it there plain, with its arms reaching out to you," and she held over the cup for me to see.

"Well it's hoping I am this day that she has hair the color of corn and gray eyes," said I.

"Maybe it's not a girl at all. What makes you think it is?"

"Maybe—but I'm thinking it is."

My aunt went back to the cup. "Here's a death. No, there's two—"

"I was knowing that already." I said it bitterly, while my heart began its aching afresh with this reminder of the two graves in Killymard.

"Poor lass! But it's not those I'm meaning. You can see for yourself that these lie after the journey across the water; and there's no grief in them for you—only trouble."

Again she held out the cup. But I had no trick for the fortune-telling, so I gave it back to her. "Tell me the ending. Have I a good ending?"

"Aye, fair. There's the child again with you and a piece of gold—and a lad with blue eyes—and another journey across the water."

"Faith, I'll be going back to the old country then to die; and 'tis the gold piece will fetch me over."

I tried hard to laugh, but the homesickness was strong on me and if I could have had my way then I would have spaded the third grave for myself beside the two back yonder.

It was three days after—a Monday evening, I mind—that my aunt came in from a day's sewing with a newsy look on her face.

"They were after saying at the Harrisons' this day that the governess is leaving the house on the hill," she began. "I was hearing Mrs. Harrison saying to her daughter that Mrs. Drene was looking for some one to take her place, and she going the middle of the week. Do you think, now—"

I saved Aunt her breath along with the trouble of finishing her question.

"Aye, I think so, Aunt, and what's more, I'll put on my things this minute and go up to the house on the hill."

"But do you think you have the learning? They were after saying that the governess yonder was leaving to go into school-teaching. It takes a deal of learning to teach school."

I laughed. "First it's too much learning I have for service—and then it's too little. Don't you be fearsome, Aunt; 'tis not myself that's looking to teach school; there'll be learning enough and to spare for the child and me till she's grown."

My aunt had said that the child's mother was a fine lady; but she was more than that. As she came into the room that evening to see what it was I wanted, I thought,—"'Tis a queen she is, for sure." And when I looked at her face close, the pictures of the Blessed Mother were not more beautiful.

Again the wish came to me that I might have found a motherless child. For with such a woman to mother her, what need had this child of the scraps and bits of life left over from the two graves in Killymard?

I told her what there was to tell about myself, barring the sorrow. She listened with a pleasant smile, asking her questions with gentleness.

"I like you, Nora Kelley," she said at last, "but I want to have my little girl in the care of some one with—shall I say—breeding?"

At this I snorted aloud. "And where can you be finding more breeding than in the Kelleys of Connaught? Tell me that. Haven't they been having breeding on them for more than a thousand years—with a scholar in every generation?"

If I hadn't been so taken with my feelings I could have laughed at myself and the way my head went up, the very same as Aunt's on the day we had been drinking tea.

"I dare say," she said, gently. "I was thinking, perhaps, of a college-bred woman like the governess who is leaving. She was an unusual student of natural history, for example; and she was already beginning to take up botany with my little girl. Later she would have been able to superintend her studies. You see—my husband is away a great deal on his concert trips and I always

accompany him. That is why I must have some one who is refined and competent and trustworthy to leave here in care of Judith."

I smiled. I wanted to ask, "Sure, can't ye be seeing it then at the end of your nose?" But instead I said: "But you've not mentioned the natural history; barring that, I think I might do. And I might be able, into the bargain, to coax a little pink into the childeen's cheeks and set her lips to laughing."

She looked at me, puzzled. "Judith is perfectly healthy; and I'm quite sure she laughs as much as the normal child."

"Maybe she does," said I. "But time has forgotten, then, to be putting down the markings on her wee face."

The puzzled look changed to a sharp frown.

"Perhaps I have kept her too much with older people and restricted her in the matter of companions; there are really no well-behaved children near here for her to play with. You see—Judith was born after Mr. Drene and I had been married a good many years, and I have always been afraid to employ young or inexperienced persons to care for her. How old are you, Nora Kelley?"

"Turned twenty-five."

"You look younger. I might consider—"

"You might let me come and try." I was too

eager to feel ashamed of the way I had taken the words out of her mouth.

"What wages would you expect, and what would you consider your position to be?"

I was mortal glad that my aunt was not by to hear my answer: "You can name the wages yourself after I have been with you a fortnight. As for the position—you can name that along with the wages."

On these terms I was engaged as nurse for Herself. I came down the hill that night with a feeling that my heart was no longer empty. I was sure, just, that a fire had been kindled on the hearth there, and the door stood open, waiting. I reached my aunt's house and hurried into the kitchen.

"Aunt," said I, "take a firm grip of your wits and of your pride, for I have to inform you that, at last, a Kelley has gone into service."

II

HERSELF MAKES THE FULL OF AN EMPTY HEART AND MYSELF BRINGS BACK THE THORN BLOOM

IT was evening when I came again to the house on the hill. Mrs. Drene was awaiting me, a look of trouble about her.

"I can't quite understand Judith. She seems afraid of your coming. This is the first time that she has ever paid very much attention to the change of governesses. I hope you will be very kind to her until she's used to you."

I was thinking it was not just kindness she was needing. Children can be afeared of kindness, sometimes, when it goes without love and understanding. Maybe the childeen was growing old enough to miss the one and hunger for the other; sure, there are not so many steps taken from the cradle before a wee child knows the difference.

"Maybe I'd best change my dress before she sees me," said I, for I was wearing the black I had crossed in, and it was no color for a fearsome child.

I found I was to have a room on the floor above, with my bed next to the child's crib in the nursery; and I hurried up to put on a light-blue print, with one of the lace collars I had made long since in Ballyshannon with the Sisters.

The nursery door was open when I came down. I found Herself sitting at a wee table, an untroubled supper before her, her mother standing near by. The two of them were looking mortal solemn.

"This is Nora, come to take care of you, dear," and that was the way Mrs. Drene made me known to Herself.

The childeen slipped from her chair, catching the ends of her white dress, and bobbing a wee courtesy. And what did I do but catch the ends of my apron and bob one back to her. Almost I caught the wisp of a smile creeping into the corners of her eyes as she went back to her supper.

Mrs. Drene stayed to be giving me directions for the night. Afterward she kissed the childeen and hurried away, saying something to her about keeping her father waiting for dinner. The two of us sat silent awhile, each a bit shy with the other. Herself played at eating and myself looked about the room. It was full of prettiness with its white furnishings and its flowered paper of gray lattice and climbing roses, and books, and toys aplenty.

But everything looked too fresh and untroubled, to my way of thinking.

The dolls in the window-seat sat so tidy and well-mannered, as if they were there to be looked at and not played with. This was barring the rag doll I had seen in her hands that first day. And the toys—none were broken or missing paint or parts. I was sure of one thing, just, the spirit of wee children had never crossed the threshold of that room. And all the time I was looking and thinking Herself was watching me with the great, solemn, curious eyes.

"Sure, it isn't hearty eating alone," said I, breaking the silence at last. "How would it be, now, if we fetched the childher over from the window-seat and gave them some tea?"

Herself did not catch the meaning till I had fetched two chairs and the full of my arms of dolls and had sat them all about her. "Maybe there might be some wee dishes for them," said I.

She answered with a silent little nod, slipped from the chair again, and went over to the cupboard in the corner. Behind the glass doors stood the very dishes I had been noticing; but I made out I was seeing them now for the first time. And what a clapping of hands I gave over the gold bands and the scattering of pink rosebuds decorating the border!

We brought the dishes together, making a great time over setting the table and serving the childher. The childeen had to be eating for them all—that was part of the game; and it wasn't finished until the last crumb of supper was gone.

"Maybe you'll be telling me their names, now," said I.

"That's Sukey." She caught up the rag doll with a quick hand and hugged it tight.

"'Tis a grand name, just. And the others?"

She shook her head.

"You're not meaning they are wanting names?" I played at great astonishment.

This time she nodded solemnly.

I threw up my hands in wonderment.

"A whole family of childher and one name to go round! Shall we be giving them each a name as we put them to bed?"

It was Herself now that was taken with the wonderment. "The dwesses tan't tum off; and there isn't any bed."

So! I was beginning to see why there was no play look about the room and why everything was so fresh and unused. Every mortal doll had her clothes sewed to her back; and I doubted if there was a Christian set of underwear among the lot of them.

"'Twill never do," said I, making a great shak-

ing of the head. "'Tis time they were all put to bed, like good childher, and had buttons and buttonholes down the length of them. Aye, with decent beds to sleep in at day's end. I'm thinking their backs must be broken entirely with the long sitting up they've had and the stitches in them."

We ended by putting them to bed on the window-seat and Herself covered them with a blanket she was not needing, from her own crib, tucking it in and smoothing it down the while she made a low, wordless croon. Then it was bed-time for Herself.

I lifted her into my lap and took off her white dress and the tumbled-down socks. I brushed the curls that were the color of corn, fastening them back with a blue ribbon so they would not be bothering her asleep. And all the time we talked of the childher—the clothes I would have to be making them the next day and the beds we would be fixing.

I mind well that first night was broken with long wakings and short sleepings. The wonder of the childeen there beside me drew me over to the crib a score of times; and I had to be seeing again the tossing of curls on the pillow and the wee hands lying on the coverlid like half-opened lough-lilies. Once, I mind, she smiled. This would seem like foolishness to those who have never cared or

hungered for a child; but to the others, sure, they are knowing well what it is to watch beside one sleeping.

It took us nearly a fortnight to get the childher to rights. There were close to a dozen all told; and what with the buttons and the underwear and the beds and the fixings, we were busy at it from cock-crow to candle-time.

The coachman and the gardener gave us a hand with the beds—two cribs and two cradles. They were made in the stable out of corn boxes, and painted white. I was knowing well enough the mother would have bought them for us if we had asked her; aye, and picked out the grandest in the toy-shops into the bargain. But that would never have been the same. It is seeing things made and having a share in the making that pleases a child most; and something made by a master toyman would not have seemed half as fine to Herself as that row of wee, rough beds with their latticed sides and the crazy rockers, when they were all finished and set up in the nursery. She danced about them, squealing like a pen of young shoats with the gladness; and the childher were put to bed that night a good two hours before sundown.

We sewed out in the garden, under a purple-lilac bush, where a pair of young robins were rais-

ing a brood. Before we were through, every one had Christian clothes—I am meaning the childher, and not the robins—with a nightgown apiece; while Herself sewed on all the buttons. And afterward—we started housekeeping on our own account under the lilac bush.

Mrs. Drene showed great amusement over our doings. She laughed at the beds and wondered why I had not asked instead to be buying them. She looked about the nursery in a strange, puzzled way; for what with the childher taking up more room and the doll's house trimmed with flowers for Sukey's third birthday, and the table set with rosebud dishes, the room wasn't the same as I had found it that first evening—not by the length of a gander's nose.

"It does not look as pretty, somehow, as it used to." Mrs. Drene spoke gently, as she always did, but I could be seeing she did not like the change overmuch.

"Maybe," I agreed. "There's not as much prettiness, but there's more happiness. Look yonder."

The childeen came skipping into the room that moment, her curls tossed, her eyes a-dancing. "Muvver! muvver! Nora and I are having a burfday party for my Sukey-doll, and cook's baking a wee cake for us!"

"I never knew any one to take so much trouble with a child as you do, Nora." Mrs. Drene was still holding fast to the look of puzzlement.

"Trouble?" said I. "What trouble?"

She nodded at the beds and the new clothes on the childher.

"That trouble! Sure, I'd be giving it a different name entirely."

She left me, after loaning me a bit of her own look of puzzlement. For she had never answered the child's gladness by look or sign; and though the change in Herself had been every bit as great as that in the nursery, her mother had taken no notice of it whatever!

Maybe I had thought it before this, but this was the first time I was thinking it consciously —that there might be more need of me in the place I had found than in the place I had thought to be finding. And God help me, I was glad!

As I have said, we started housekeeping under the lilac bush, with a box of broken dishes and thrown-away treasures from the rest of the house. There were cracked saucers and cups without handles, and empty biscuit- and spice-tins and bits of boxes and bottles.

At first, the robins put up a great fluttering and argument about our moving in; but after a few

days they settled down contented-like to our company, and Herself and the mother bird raised their childher together. I showed my dearie how to be making many things out of nothings—the way a poor child learns so quickly and a rich child misses the trick of. There were baskets from willow twigs and reeds, goblets from acorns, chains and bracelets from rose-hips after the petals had dropped, and a wonderment of things from oak and beech leaves.

We made our stove of stones and mud, with a flat bit of slate for a top and a curved branch for a pipe; there we cooked the patty-cakes of rose leaves, Dutch cheeses, and færies' bread. The childher feasted well those days and the robins picked up the scatterings.

I needn't be telling you that I fetched from Donegal, along with other things, the tales of the færies. No matter what else she brings with her from the old country, an Irish lass never fails to fetch some of these along, whether she owns to it or not.

Herself was never tired of listening. Often and often when the wee bare legs grew weary with the tramping and the playing, she would come running to me, her arms wide stretched, calling: "Nora's lap—I want Nora's lap and a 'tory!" And I would gather her close, there under the shade of

the lilac bush or in the nursery window-seat, at day's end and tell her of the Wee People.

It wasn't long before she had the tales as well as I; and over one night, just, she had them fetched from Ireland—a whole rath full of færies—and put them to living under the hill in the garden.

After that there were lively doings. We had to be putting out sups of bread and milk for them at night, and always remembering to scatter the crumbs from our cakes so they would never be planting the hungry grass for some poor mortal to cross.

Often and often, when I was busy in the kitchen getting her supper, or out for my afternoon, I would find where the færies had been tidying up the toy box or putting the dolls' house to rights; while Herself would be dancing about and clapping her hands at my surprise, crying: "Good fæwies been here, Nora—such good fæwies!"

Sometimes it was the other way around. Herself would wake up in the morning and find a new dress for Sukey hanging to the climbing vine outside her window—just where the færies had hung it. Or when she came back from a drive with her mother she would find where the Wee People had hidden most of her supper in the garden—a wee pot of honey in the honeysuckle, sponge-cakes in the hearts of the hollyhocks, and brown bread and

butter on the sunflowers. And always a wee *cruiskeen* of milk under the færies' own thorn bush.

It was wonderful how easy it was to coax down every crumb of a færy supper, when sometimes the ones from the kitchen went begging. But it was more wonderful how fast the thorn bloom was growing into the cheeks, and that was all because of the *cruiskeens* of milk; and the way the laughter was creeping into her lips—and that was because the færies themselves had kneaded the sunflower-bread; and how quickly her feet were learning to dance, never wearying of it, and all because they had touched the rim of a færy ring.

Strange to tell, the coming of the færies made more trouble for Mrs. Drene than the changes in the nursery. From the worriment in her face the evening she called me into her room I had almost the notion I had been caught coaxing an epidemic of something over the threshold of the nursery. But what—I couldn't be guessing.

"I can't quite understand all Judith is saying about færy pipers and færy gifts, and a lot more nonsense. But I'm afraid, Nora, you've been filling my little girl's head with foolish Irish superstitions; and—and it musn't go on."

She looked so grieved and put out that the fear took me I might have to be giving notice.

"I'm sorry," said I, remembering the humility

I had been taught in the Sisters' School, "but the childeen must be having some one to play with. You've been barring out other children for fear of bad manners and measles; and, faith, the færies would be fetching neither of those ailments with them. They're quite harmless, m'am; and it's naught but a pretty play with Herself. When you come to think of it sensibly, why shouldn't she be putting færies into her play—the same as the painters and the writers and the musicians have been putting them into theirs for hundreds of years past?"

"But she actually believes in them—she thinks she sees them."

I could not be keeping the smile from my face.

"Sure, she might be seeing worse things," said I. "But what harm can it do to go neighboring with a few pretty fancies, and all the time Herself growing stronger and bonnier?"

If she couldn't be seeing the change for herself, I thought it high time to be drawing her notice to it.

At this Mrs. Drene laughed softly.

"She's certainly growing noisier. Mr. Drene has had to do all his practising of late in the music-room with the doors and windows closed. Judith's laughter seems to fill the place."

I sobered. "And would you be sending her back to her silent ways?"

She wrinkled her forehead in the puzzled way that she had.

"You have a strange way of putting things, Nora Kelley. I believe you think Judith wasn't happy just because she was so quiet before you came."

"I've the notion that it doesn't matter what I might be thinking. But I know this—there's many a child that grows up without happiness and never finds it out till she's too old to pick up the road to it. Neither you nor I would be wishing that on the childeen. So let the færies bide, m'am; and I'll promise to be stopping with them and not be coaxing over any pookas or banshees for company."

In the end she gave in; but it was plain seeing that she did not understand. Faith, any mother who was too blind or too busy to see how empty was the wee life going on under her roof would never be understanding the need of filling it with fancies—if nothing better was handy.

So fancies were my choosing; and there was more to them than the færies, just. It began back when the robins first were nesting and we were watching the mother bird keeping the eggs warm and the father doing the marketing. The childeen

had been sitting still for a space, her eyes fast on the pair of them.

"Where's my farver bird?" she asked, after a bit; and then she looked hard at the childher scattered on the ground at her feet.

"Sure, Nora, there must be some one to help me bwing up the childher."

I laughed at the snatch of Irish she had and the notion that had popped into her head.

"Sure, that would be Himself," said I.

"Who's that?"

"Who but Himself, just. Though I'm not saying he may not be having another name to him some day."

There was no more said about it then. But the next day I overheard Herself putting manners on the childher. They were terribly given to tumbling out of their swings in the lilac bush and upsetting the tea-table in under them.

"If you're not good childher this time," I heard her saying, "I'll be telling Himself—and he won't be bwinging you any nice, nice worms to-morrow day."

"Worms?" said I. "Do you think that would be any treat for the childher?"

She wrinkled up her bit of a forehead just like her mother and looked at me questioningly. "But the farver bird bwought worms."

"Aye, worms for good birdeens; but what's the matter with honey-cakes for good childher?"

She clapped her hands; and after that Himself had always to be coming, the full of his pockets of honey-cakes.

That was the beginning of it. It wasn't long before Himself was as real as the færies; and there were three of us keeping house with the robins under the lilac bush, with every prospect of the childher having a grand raising.

The childeen could tell down to the last button and belt how Himself looked. Even a wee woman has a ready eye for clothes; and as the styles and seasons passed, Himself was sure to be wearing the clothes that fitted him and the time best. I mind well he came first in trousers of "bwown-pink"—a favorite color with her. Then followed a trailing of sailor and Eton suits, Norfolk and corduroy knickers; and after those— But I am jumping over the tale again and forgetting the middle.

Sometimes Himself would be waiting for us by the lilac bush when we came out in the morning; sometimes we would beat him to it and Herself would be starting her housekeeping with one eye on her work and one on the garden walk. Then of a sudden her mouth would take to dimpling, the gray eyes to laughing, and away and away she would dance down the walk to meet Himself

and a new day of adventuring for the both of them.

There was not a single great adventure of childhood that they missed, I'm thinking. They fought giants, slew dragons, discovered countries, and dug for gold; they traveled on wishing-carpets and enchanted horses, made invisible cloaks, and knew the very stone that covered the entrance to the cavern where Aladdin had hidden his lamp.

The garden was not over-large; a man could have circled it in twenty puffs of his pipe. But to Herself—with Himself for company—it reached away and beyond to that most magical country of all which lies "east of the sun and west of the moon."

Maybe you are wondering how, out of a bundle of tales and fancies, aye, and idle sayings, the life of a child could be fashioned to seem so real and plentiful. But, sure, 'tis the best and surest way of fashioning some lives, I'm thinking. For real things are often missing, and thinking long for them might so easily be breaking your heart if you didn't be hurrying them out of your mind with fancies and promises. Isn't it better, when all's said and done, to be playing happiness into your life than reasoning it out?

These were my notions, but I was knowing well they might not be Mrs. Drene's; and I was not

for telling her about Himself unless she stumbled on him by chance, just. And this never happened, for the childeen never coaxed him into the house, and, strangely enough, never gossiped of him as she had of the færies.

Not that I was meaning to hold back aught the mother had a right to know, nor was I meaning to cheat her of one whit of the child's life; but I was in mortal fear if she ever discovered Himself along with the færies she would banish the lot. And how could I alone be guarding and keeping the treasures of thorn bloom and dimples and dancing feet? So I said to myself, said I:

"Nora Kelley, what some people don't know will never be pestering them. Till that day when Himself comes a-wooing in the flesh with real clothes to his back and real words on his tongue you'll not be saying a word about the spirit of him yonder, keeping a child from hungering for real playmates. Sure, there's sense in all things."

So my tongue laid my conscience.

With the memories of Herself crowding back to me, I am forgetting to tell much of the parents; yet they are having a place in the tale, after all. For where would have been the beginning of it but for them? And who but themselves marked the trail we were following to the end!

Mrs. Drene had told me that the childeen had

come after a long marriage—and that pointed the reason to much. Such a short time it took me to understand that all she wanted of life was her husband, and all he wanted was her and the music; and there was no need of a greater binding of love between them in the shape of the child.

You had but to be seeing the light spring into her face when he called to her, or marking how dulled were her senses to aught else when she was listening for his step on the threshold, or watching the look in his eyes when he was playing for her, to know the truth of this. Aye, their love was a great one—but not the greatest, or it would have made room for Herself, even if it took a bit of crowding.

Sure, 'tis a long, strange journey for a wee child to be making alone from that unknown country; and what right had they to be denying her a welcome when she came? Tell me that!

There was never a hint of unkindness, mind you. Everything that the childeen needed or wanted was bought almost before the wish was made; and they treated her always with great gentleness, though the gentleness often had a touch of amusement.

I wondered if they did not think, between themselves, that nature had played them a sorry trick in sending her; and while they were bound to do their duty, they were not called upon to give over-

much of their time or their love or their companionship to her.

There were days when the mother was too busy to come into the nursery at all; and often the father did not see her from one week end to another. Weeks at a time they were both away on one of his concert trips; and I would be reading in the papers the grand accounts of his playing and the big audiences he would be having everywhere, listening to him and praising. And every night I would be mailing them a card on which was written always the same thing:

DEAR MADAME,—Judith is well and sends her love.
Respectfully yours,
N. KELLEY.

That was all they expected. With their minds at rest about her, they were free to spend their love on each other—down to the last farthing; and always they would come back to the house on the hill looking like a pair of young lovers home from a honeymoon.

It was the strange sight then to watch their faces when Herself came to meet them. It was as if they were catching a glimpse of a beautiful dream; but the glimpse satisfied, and they would be keeping the dream itself from coming true if they could have their wish. And when her laughter

broke the dreaming, her wee feet dancing toward them and her lips calling, "Muvver—Farver!" they would turn to each other, the silence on them, always with the startled, unbelieving look in their eyes.

To them she was never more than a beautiful flower or a rare treasure; but, sure, hearts never break with the withering of the one or the losing of the other. And often and often the feeling came strong upon me how easily the two could be living out their lives to the fullest without her.

When Mr. Drene was kept in the city with his banking, Herself would be taken driving, sitting curled up in the seat of the carriage, her hands tight folded, and the look on her face as solemn as the Wise Woman herself. She was never noisy then, I can promise you; and the instant she was back in the house again she was sure to be wanting my lap and a tale of the færies.

Whenever there was a gathering of musicians at the house the childeen was always sent for. They made much of her, tossing her about among them, sitting her at the piano when they played, or on a pedestal when they sang to her.

It was only when her father played that she was sent from the room. He was always afeared of her fidgeting and taking his mind from his music. Then she came back to me and the nursery; and

soon after three of the musicians would generally be following. These were Hans Van Cleef, the Dutch 'cellist; Mayberry, the piano-player and maker of music; and young Paul Godfrey, a violin-player like her father.

What romps they would have with her, and the games they would be connivering! Little Hans—as the childeen called him—was always for having a "festspiel," which I took to be anything from a county fair to a wedding; then they would be dressing up themselves as well as the childher, and Mr. Godfrey would make music for whatever it happened to be on his violin.

Sometimes Mr. Mayberry would bring tricks in his pocket. He was a wonder at trick-turning; and beside his the færies' doings looked poor and foolish. If he had a mind to, he could bring anything out of the pockets in his long Prince Albert—it might be a Paris doll or a white rabbit; he could find pennies in the childher's pockets and sweets in the cupboard. He nearly scattered my wits entirely the day he found a wisp of Irish heather in a fold of my apron.

How he ever had the time, with all his playing and writing, to learn the trick art was a mystery to me till I saw him at the piano for the first time and watched his fingers fly over the keys—then I understood. But it was always Mr. Godfrey that

came first and stayed longest; and I knew the childeen liked him best.

Those were green memories for Herself and myself—the days when the three came and played in the nursery. We would have them to talk about for a week after, and to wish for a week ahead; and there was small need of Himself or the færies then.

The summer went quickly, faster than I could make a counting, and the winter came with no talk of my going. Mrs. Drene had said nothing after that first day about a governess with more learning; and after the fortnight had gone I settled down with the hope that I might bide for many a year. Yet often and often, though I kept the tight grip of the hope, the fear of losing her would come over me so fiercely that it seemed as if I could never face the digging of a third grave—for so my going would have seemed. Every day, with its dole of work and care, bound me closer to her; and I knew if the time ever threatened when she might be taken from me I should not let her go without a hard fight to keep her. I was glad to be remembering then that the Kelleys of Connaught were good fighters as well as the tellers of tales.

A thing happened in the early winter that brought both pain and gladness. I have forgotten

how the knowledge came to me that Herself had never been properly christened, but I knew it for the truth and it troubled me not a little. To my way of thinking, it was almost as careless as if the parents had never taken the trouble to be properly married on her account.

Sure, the giving of a name and blessing by the Church—whatever the Church—should mean much to a child, though little she may be knowing it. I heard that the Episcopal bishop was to be preaching soon in the church at the foot of our hill; and I went with my trouble to Mrs. Drene.

She laughed kindly at my notion at first. Maybe she was thinking it just another one of the foolish Irish superstitions; but she promised to talk it over with the childeen's father. To my great wonder, they made their minds up on it; and I was given my wish to be making the dress my dearie would wear.

I have it now—wrapped in soft paper with sweet lavender, but I needn't be taking it out to remember the stitches that went into the making. The top is tucked between bands of fine Irish lace, and there is a running of lace about the neck and wrists and waist. The bottom is sprigged with thorn blossoms and wee shamrock; and white ribbons fasten it.

I sat at the back of the church and watched

Herself go by on her father's shoulder, down the dim aisle to the chancel. The mother was beside them; and for the first time since I had left the graveyard at Killymard there were stinging tears on my face and bitterness in my heart.

For wasn't I knowing then what it means to be a servant! Moreover, wouldn't it always be the same? I could have no real part in the sacraments of her life—so I was thinking; for who was I to claim a place there at the church railing? I might be stitching my love into the things that clothed her, and it might be my hands would be brushing her curls and fastening her slippers; but my place would be at the back with no link between us but my service.

Aye, there was bitterness aplenty in my heart then; but now—sure, now I am knowing there was more to the link than service, just. And whenever I unwrap the wee dress and smooth it afresh I mind the thing that happened that very afternoon.

We were back from church and Herself was coming down the long stairs with Sukey in her arms. She had gone alone to fetch her and it just happened that her father and mother and myself were all waiting at the foot of the stairs.

How it came about I could never tell. Her foot must have caught on a step; for she stumbled and fell the length of those stairs before one of us could

save her. I was there first, but I stepped back for the mother. Sure, wasn't it her right to be first? Though I was near crazy to be snatching up that wee white bundle of stillness that lay at our feet.

In a minute she had opened her eyes; but it was not to her mother that the arms reached out, nor the mother's face that the gray eyes sought.

"Nora—I want Nora's lap."

She was not hurt, God be praised! But for the rest of the day I rocked her in the big chair in the nursery and told again, for the thousandth time, the tales of the færies. And, strange to say, there was no jealousy in the mother's heart over her coming to me. Aunt was right—she was a fine woman; only she had in her face the wishful look that she might be feeling the hurt more.

And as I rocked and crooned the afternoon away the words of Doctor Danny came back to me; and at last I was knowing for sure that I had found the full of an empty heart.

III

AS IN THE OLD TALE—THE CASTLE IS DESTROYED

I TAUGHT the childeen her letters, and the reading and writing and number work. But the time came when I had not the learning to teach her more, and she went down the hill each morning with her father to a little school kept by a gentlewoman.

It was long before I was used to the mornings without her. For days I dallied about the nursery, my mind on nothing at all, and my heart following after her. Whatever I did—it was always with the one eye on the clock, waiting for the hands to point the minute when I could be leaving to bring her home.

In the four years and more I had been there, there had been changes aplenty.

The lilac bush had grown twice its size and sheltered five broods of robins, while the house in under it was for let, as you might say. We brought the childher out occasionally—as Herself

took the fancy; but you couldn't be calling it regular housekeeping, for the stove had long since crumbled away and the most of the broken dishes were missing.

As for the childher themselves, they had taken to terrible habits, sitting up for a week at a time, and eating barely once a fortnight. Many of the toys had left the nursery, and instead there was a desk and blackboard, more books, paints and clay, and the like.

The færies had gone trooping back to Ireland, one by one, leaving only their tales behind them. We rarely spoke of Himself, though I was knowing full well that he was still about having a share in much that she did.

But there was no sadness in these changes. It was good to see the garden of an afternoon filled with children, friends she had made and brought from school. I would watch them from the window—or from the shade somewhere; and when they had tired of their running and game-playing they would come to find me and beg for a story while they rested. Often and often I felt like an old hen with a mixed brood—but Holy Mother, how I liked it!

There were changes in Herself as well; and I am meaning more than the growing and the learning. For the most part, she was as merry as the

childeen that had danced on the rim of the færy ring; but days came bringing strange moods.

She would go mooning about with a wee, sad face and no mind for playing; and there was naught I could do to mend matters, nor could I find any reason lying back of it. Sometimes I wondered if it was a bit of her father growing out—for he was given to times of silence and brooding; sometimes I wondered if the years were slowly bringing her the knowledge of what a small part she had in the lives and love of the two nearest to her. And whichever way I wondered it left me fearsome.

She was very quick to feel things, and this grew with the years. It took such a little to make her happy—and such a little to break her heart. I was knowing then that her life would not lie along level places; there would be great heights, aye, and great depths for her before ever she reached the plains of heather that stretch toward the setting sun.

Her tongue would run loose with happiness, carrying every one with her for a share in whatever joy she had found; but it was ever leashed under sorrow, and I could rarely break the silence. This, I think, was what troubled me most, for a sorrow shared is ofttimes sorrow spent; and in the years to come I knew that whatever hurt might befall

my dearie I should have to be finding the cause and the cure of it, with no help but my own wits.

But the greatest change of all lay with the two—the father and mother. It began with the time he went West, playing, and the train was wrecked and his arm broken. It was his right arm, close by the wrist, and it was a day and a half before he could get it properly set.

After that, though he had the best care the city specialists could give, it never mended right. They broke it and set it again; but it bettered it little and he couldn't be taking up the bow and playing a measure without the steady grinding pain in his arm.

He tried to bear it for a while—but pain is ever a hard companion for a man and, bit by bit, it took the heart out of him. He tried playing a few times more in public; but a night came in the new, great hall in the city, with thousands listening to him, when he stopped in the middle of the music, his face all twisted with pain, and threw the violin the length of the stage from him.

He groped his way to the entrance like a man stricken. After that he never played before any one, not even his wife; but often and often I would waken in the dead of night to hear a breath of melody—just a breath—coming up from the music-room. It never lasted more than a few seconds

and it sounded like the caoining of a soul in bursting agony.

I could never be bearing to see the faces of either of them on the mornings after. His was full of a wild inside clamoring like a caged beast; hers had the touch of death to it.

She forgot the child—for days I think she was hardly knowing she was there at all. All her wits and wisdom were spent on the one thing—helping him to forget. With the going of the music he went into the banking with a fierce humor, more like a man gone crazy than one with his senses. His name was often in the paper—rumors of great sums of money he had made and more that he had lost.

He would spend a fortune, in a minute, for a picture or a bit of marble, bring it home and forget in a few days that it was there. He would come home, sudden-like, a pleasure trip planned. I would be called in to help the two of them pack and off in half an hour; only to see them come home before the trip was half taken, with a fresh gathering of trouble in their faces.

It was a terrible thing to watch—a man losing himself like dry leaves in a storm; and the woman helpless, for all her love.

There is mercy in all things, I'm thinking, if a body can take the time to sift for it. For once I

was glad their love had not been great enough to take in Herself, although who can be saying it might not have been great enough to spare her and save themselves. But as it was, she knew little of the happenings. Having ever been but a small part of their lives, there was naught to miss now; and she was too young to be seeing for herself.

Moreover, her days were full of gladness, with the school and the coming of the children.

Now that her mother had left all the care to me, I saw to it that she spent many an afternoon in other, happier houses. There were parties in winter and picnics in summer; and often I would take her with me on my days out—sometimes to the city for a bit of sight-seeing, sometimes to my aunt for a drinking of tea.

She dearly loved the last. Coming into the kitchen, she would put on Aunt's apron and help me stir the currants in the griddle bread and set the table with scones and honey or jam—for we had always to be having it in the Irish way, just. She would sit behind the tea things—Aunt was sure to ask her to pour—sipping her cup that had a bare coloring of tea in it and talking of the time we'd be going to Donegal together.

Then I had to be telling her of all the people back yonder—my people of Killymard. She was never tired of hearing of the Sisters of Bally-

shannon, of the bickerings between Tomais, the bailiff, and Tomais, the cobbler, of old Paddy, the half-wit, who had seen the færies and heard the banshee; and, most of all, of Doctor Danny—God bless him! But there was always one memory I held fast, and Herself was never told of my lad and the birdeen.

For a year it seemed as if the throuble was growing apace—gathering a bit here and a bit there, like a threatening storm, with no hand to stay it. Though I kept it, after a fashion, from my dearie, I could not help but be knowing that sooner or later it would touch her along with the others.

With the music gone, there were no longer the gatherings of musicians; only the three came as of old, Hans Van Cleef, Mr. Mayberry, and young Paul Godfrey. This was not because they were asked, but because they would not stay away; and it was easy to see the gladness in Mrs. Drene's welcome. I think she hoped each time their coming might be mending his trouble a bit. They tried to take him out of himself with foolish jokes and doings, or talk of the money-market and stocks—the only thing that still held his interest.

I overheard a good deal about Mr. Paul Godfrey's money then. He was the only one of the three that was rich, and I gathered that he had

taken his money out of the bank—or the chimney corner—and given it to Mr. Drene to put into copper or steel, or some kind of hardware.

Mrs. Drene seemed to be afeared it was wild doings; but the others laughed at her and made great talk of their being kings some day of whatever they were buying. To me it sounded far more foolish and strange than the talk of the færies; nor could I be seeing half the promise to it.

The three came to the nursery the same as before and played with the childeen. Mr. Mayberry did his tricks and Little Hans made up the "festspiels"; the only difference was that Mr. Godfrey no longer brought his violin. It did my heart good to watch them together.

Little Hans—so short and fat, and bald halfway back on his crown, with a face to him as round and red as a hardy pippin set with bright, twinkling eyes, and a mouth ever ready to smile. He always wore bright neckties and waistcoats and white socks—always the white socks.

Mr. Mayberry was the splitting opposite of Little Hans. He was long and thin, with a mop of black hair, and black eyes set deep under bushy brows; and though he might keep us laughing till our sides ached with his tricks and his wit, I think I could be counting the times on one hand that I have seen him smile.

As for Mr. Godfrey—he was just a great boy, ready for the first bit of fun or excitement that beckoned. Among them danced the childeen as beautiful as any king's daughter; and often and often I would be saying to myself:

"Nora Kelley, if Herself is ever needing friends, there are three good ones yonder; you could not be asking for better."

I have said the trouble grew like a storm, aye, and like a storm it broke, as sudden, as terrifying, and ending with a trail of wreckage.

For a week Mr. Drene was back and forth from the city at any time of the day or night, with messengers coming and going, and Mrs. Drene following when she could, silent and pale like a wraith. I think neither of them slept much; and, according to cook, their food came back to the kitchen almost untouched.

Twice I overheard her trying to coax him away somewhere where they had never been before and that would be new to them both. But he would hear naught of it, begging her to stop pesthering him with her worriments and notions. Those were the only times I ever heard him impatient with her; and I could see that his words, along with the change that was growing in him, and her fear, were breaking her heart, just.

At the end of the week there came two days with

nothing but silence in the house. Mr. Drene stayed in the city and there were no messengers—no word from him whatever. At the end of the second day Mrs. Drene could be bearing it no longer; she put on her things and went after him.

By a miracle she missed the evening papers; so that I'm thinking we had the news at the house before ever she had it. I can see the head-lines now, running the length of the first page; and there was no need to be reading further, for they told all there was to know.

There had been a panic in Wall Street; the hardware stuff had gone to pieces, and Charles Drene, the fiddling banker, was ruined. I wish the head-lines might have ended there, for there's many a life can build itself up out of a ruined fortune, and sure poverty is no curse; but there was more wreckage to the storm than that. The banker had seen his lawyer for an hour following the crash, and then alone in his office, before his secretary could reach him, he had shot himself dead.

There was naught for us in the house to do but wait and keep the knowledge from the childeen. We made a feast for the childher and there was a place for Himself at the head of the table. All the merriment and fancy and magic we could coax into the nursery that night we needed to keep the

trouble from stealing in on us unawares; and after I had put Herself to bed, and watched her asleep, I went down-stairs to wait for their home-coming.

It was midnight when they came. Paul Godfrey was in the carriage with Mrs. Drene. They had driven all the way from the city—and behind them came the long, dark wagon with what I thought was the end of the wreckage. But with the first look at her face I knew there would be more coming in with the storm.

They laid Mr. Drene in his music-room; and as I passed the door ajar on my way up-stairs and saw him lying there, I minded all the joking talk between him and Mr. Godfrey, and I couldn't help but be thinking what a way for a king of any kind to come home.

I took Mrs. Drene up and put her to bed the same as if it had been Herself, watching until she had fallen asleep with the powders the doctor had brought. The gray of the morning was in the sky before I went back to the nursery, and, though my heart was near breaking with the sorrow of it all, there was anger in it as well.

With the coming of the day there was work for all of us, aye, work for our hands and our wits. We told the childeen as little as we could, keeping back all the bitter blackness of it. Reporters hung

about thick as rooks; and lawyers and doctors, friends and curiosity-mongers, came and went all day.

Little Hans and Mr. Mayberry saw the most of them at the door and sent them away, their tongues in their cheeks; and wherever there was need of a friend in the house or out, there they were. Mr. Godfrey never left the music-room, barring Mrs. Drene called for him or he came for a glimpse of the childeen. All through the days and nights he kept watch by his dead friend and master—for he had worshiped his violin-playing, besides honoring the man himself. I knew him then for the rare gentleman he was, though it was not until the night after the funeral and later that I learned the full of his fineness.

The three came back from the cemetery with Mrs. Drene. I had kept the childeen at home with me, for we had planned between us, Little Hans, Mr. Mayberry, Mr. Godfrey, and myself, that unless the mother wished it we would keep Herself away from the church and all.

And the mother never once asked for her. So I took her down for a tea-drinking with Aunt and coaxed her to bed early before the others came back. I mind she asked to be hearing again the story of the king's daughter as I helped her off with the clothes; and the tale was fresh with me

as I went down to meet the carriage I had heard on the gravel.

Mrs. Drene was carried in by two of them; and Little Hans caught me by the apron to hold me back from following her.

"Good Nora, wait. There is a thing you have to be told." He waited for them to pass out of earshot, then pushed me down on the carved settle in the hall. "There; you can tell never when news of the best will crumble the legs and it is well to have something else under you. See, my good Nora."

The smile that was always so ready to come was there in his face, but it was drawn with sorrow this time—sorrow and trouble.

"I'm ready, and what more might it be?" said I, knowing well what I had been fearing myself ever since they had brought him home.

Little Hans pointed to the room above.

"The poor lady has the broken heart—it is not to be wondered. She has lived only to lay him to rest—that is all. Now we think—the doctors know—she will be following soon after him."

I nodded. Bad as it was, this was no news to me.

"Ach—well—and what of the child?"

"What of her?"

"You ask that? You ask that now—you—and we, the three, have been saying for a day past, that

Nora of the good Irish wits she would know what to do."

I threw up my hands.

"And can you be making a peahen mother its young if it hasn't a mind to! Sure, this isn't the time to be choosing pleasant words—'tis the time for plain speaking; and when has yonder lady ever shown the full of a thimble of mother-love for the childeen? Tell me that?"

"Exactly. You are but for putting our thoughts into your own Irish words. But now—with the great love gone is it too late to take to the child?"

As he was asking the question the other two came down the stairs and joined us.

"Have you told Nora just how everything stands?" Mr. Mayberry asked the question of Hans.

"Gott in Himmel, man! Can one tongue a hundred reasons make in five minutes? We are but getting to the plain speaking—so—Nora?"

Mr. Mayberry planted himself squarely in front of me, and I could be seeing with half an eye how heavily the trouble sat with them.

"Here's the thing in a nutshell, Nora. Mr. Drene did not die until there was nothing left—nothing, mind you! Not only all his money went in that mad speculating, but all of Mrs. Drene's

and Mr. Godfrey's here. That means there is nothing left for his daughter."

"Nothing!"

The word stumbled off from my tongue. "Why, you must be crazy, man. There is the house, and it's full from attic to cellar with paintings and marbles and violins worth a fortune. They would bring the childeen enough to keep her from want until she married."

But Mr. Mayberry shook his head and Paul Godfrey turned away with a groan, his hands covering his face.

"There is nothing," he repeated. "When Mr. Drene sent for his lawyer at the last, he deeded every bit of his real estate and personal property to Mr. Godfrey. He tried in a measure, you see, to pay back a little of the money he lost."

"But the childeen—had he no thought of her?"

"We don't know, but we think he must have forgotten, in his frenzied condition, that he would forfeit his life insurance, which, of course, would have gone to her had he not taken his life.

"But this is all beside the real issue. If Mrs. Drene dies—and the doctors think now that it is only a matter of days, perhaps hours—there has been no provision made for the legal guardianship of the child. That will probably mean that she will be given into the care of the nearest responsible

relative. Did you ever happen to know anything about Mr. Drene's brother, Nora?"

The brother had been in the house for the funeral, that was all; and I had never heard any one speak of him before. From the looks on the faces of the three I could be seeing now that they had no liking for him, and my own heart went cold. For there was no other meaning to Mr. Mayberry's words but that he feared the child would be given to her uncle; and how they felt about that was plain.

"He is a cold, hard business man. He and his wife worship two gods—money and fashion. If the courts appointed him as guardian what would happen to little Judith, Nora?"

But it was Paul Godfrey who answered Mr. Mayberry's question, and not myself.

"I can tell you all exactly what would happen. I've been in their house in Chicago—I know how they live. They'd put her in the hands of the latest thing in French governesses and send her to the smartest finishing school; they'd train out every bit of her fragrance and poetry, and finish her off like a Paris doll.

"They wouldn't be keeping you, Nora—not a bit of it; and they wouldn't be liking the rest of us round—we're too free and natural and plain-spoken. And in the end there'd be nothing left of

the little Judith we know now—nothing but clothes and manners."

"It is possible they could not over-make her," said Little Hans. "She might, instead, wither away."

"Faith, they're both pleasant thoughts you're giving me," I spoke, hardly knowing what I said.

Take my dearie from me! Give her into the care of some one who had no love for her but would make of her just a thing of fashion that could be picked up quickly when the time was ripe as a mate, by a man of that class who is looking for style in a wife and little else! They could never do it. I said to myself it would be as Little Hans had said—she would die first.

So I sat there with the misery in my heart, aye, and on my face, looking at the three about me. Then the thought came to me, like a flash from a dark sky. This thing should not be. I would fight it—I, Nora Kelley, of the Kelleys of Connaught, who had been fighters as well as tale-makers. And I made ready then and there; by putting away everything but my love for Herself—every bit of sorrow and pity I had felt for her mother.

"You'll be her guardian—the three of you, that's what!" said I, getting to my two feet.

"And what's more, I'm going to her mother now to see that she doesn't be dying till she has made it legal and holding by the court for all time."

They held me back from the stairs. "Wait a minute, Nora. What are you going to do?" It was Paul Godfrey speaking, and he looked fearsome.

"Haven't I told you, just! I'm not going to let her die until she's thought and planned for the child. Let me go, sir. I have my mind made, and I'll not be coming too late now." I slipped from their hold and went up the stairs.

The doctor was with Mrs. Drene when I went in. He was trying to raise her in the bed, and holding a small glass of something to her lips.

"Try to drink it," I heard him saying. "You know it is the duty of every honest doctor to fight for his patient's life as long as life is there. Please drink this."

But she only moaned and pushed the glass from her.

"Faith," said I, as I crossed the room, and there was grimness the whole length of me, "Nora Kelley, you're in time to help the doctor mind his duty," and I took the glass from his hand and leaned over the bed.

"You'll be drinking this, Mrs. Drene," said I;

and, God forgive me, there was little gentleness in my voice, though I raised her as carefully as if she had been my own dearie.

She had fallen away until she looked a wraith; but her face still held the beauty and her great eyes looked up at me like a lost soul's out of Paradise begging to come in.

"I can't, Nora," she whispered. "Just leave me alone. I want—to go—now—to him," and the white lids closed as if she would be having her wish and no one could be staying her.

"I'm not doubting it," said I. "Dying comes mortal easy sometimes—easier than living—and I'm the last to be keeping back any that has the right to go. But there's something hindering you, Mrs. Drene, and I'm only helping you bide a bit till you've done your duty," and I shook her a bit, gently, that she might not be losing the meaning of my words.

I heard the doctor gasp as he strode over to me; but I shook my head at him and raised her higher, forcing the glass to her lips.

"You were speaking of your duty a moment past," said I, low, to him. "Don't be forgetting it now. And, what's more, don't you be forgetting that as long as he lived she gave him the most of her love and herself, leaving a bare shillin's worth —as you might say—for any one else. Sure it

wouldn't be harming him any now if he waited while she stopped to think for the child."

She must have caught the last word, for she opened her eyes and repeated it after me.

"The child! I had forgotten the child—" and she moaned wearily.

"Aye, I was knowing it. But I'll see you're not forgetting her again. Drink this. 'Twill give you strength and wits, maybe, to think for her," and I opened her mouth and poured the stuff down.

She lay back on the pillows, spent, barely breathing for a space; then I could catch the breaths coming stronger, and the doctor nodded in a pleased fashion as he held her pulse. In another minute her eyes opened again; and this time the lids did not flutter and there was more sense in her look.

"What of the child, Nora?"

"Aye, what of her? Who is to look after her when you're gone?"

A look of pain flashed into her eyes.

"I thought—I thought— Why, you wouldn't leave her, Nora—she's so little—she needs you—"

"I wouldn't be leaving her—if I had a right to keep her. But are you forgetting the law?"

And with it fresh on my own tongue, 'twas an easy matter repeating it for her. I could see the doctor scowling at me; and between his lips he

was mumbling something about my killing the patient, but what did I care then. Wasn't I knowing I was cruel to the poor soul? But isn't there more virtue sometimes in cruelty than in kindness? Tell me that! So I gave myself free tongue and went on:

"You know as well as I or anybody that the court will be giving her to her uncle; and would he be keepin' the likes of me if the notion didn't please him?"

Her hands moved troubled-wise over the coverlid.

"Why do you worry me, Nora? I'm sure you're just borrowing trouble. It's not a case for the court. Everything will be all right."

She smiled at a sudden thought, "Why, you can tell them it was my wish—my wish that you should have the care of Judith."

With that she closed her eyes, as if the matter was settled and she was free to be gone to him.

I'm thinking the doctor was of the same mind, for he moved closer to the bed and caught my arm to draw me away. But he was not knowing what was in my mind nor the line of my ancestors. I shook his hand off and I pointed to the door.

"If that is her wish," said I, "we'll be setting it down on paper so it will keep after she's gone; and

there'll be more than just the word of an Irish servant to hold it. Go fetch the three down yonder, and ink and paper along with them!"

"I can't give my consent to this;" he spoke gruffly. "This is wilfully hastening the patient's death. She couldn't stand the strain of any legal proceedings now."

"Then she'll be having her wish the sooner," said I, grimmer than before. I turned on him sharply.

"Man, what are you thinking of? Is this the time to be thinking of the dying or the living? Since the time you brought the childeen into the world, have you or I or anyone hindered the mother in having her way? Have you ever pestered her with the little love she ever spared the child—whatever you might be thinking? Well—'tis time to pester a bit now—before it is too late, I'm thinking. And before you fetch up the three you'd best be pouring out more of that brown stuff," and I held the empty glass before him.

He went, as I knew he would; and I raised Mrs. Drene and made her drink again. She moaned afresh as the others came in and we cleared the table and spread out the writing-things.

"Why, why can't you let me die in peace? You're torturing me—keeping me here with your quibbles and your questions. Go—go!"

She sank back as if she would slip past us all and leave us with the thing undone.

I took a firm grip of her hands and waited until her eyes opened again.

"Look you—there'll be more than just him waiting for you in the Country Beyond. What answer will you make, now, to God Himself, aye, and the Blessed Mother when they ask you what you have done with the childeen? You can't be putting them off as you would us, saying you were too weary to be thinking. Wouldn't it be easier—and pleasanter to have a good accounting at your tongue's end and say, instead: 'Sure, now, Holy Mother, I've left her with the three best friends she has—and with Nora to look after her. And I've put my name to the paper to make it binding.' "

She made no struggle after that; lying there with her eyes open and the ghost of a smile on her lips as the three drew up as best they could, with the knowledge of law that they had, her last will and testament. When finished it read about this way:

I, Margaret Drene, being of sound mind, though failing body, on this tenth day of October, ——, do hereby will, bequeath, and dispose the right of guardianship of my daughter, Judith Drene, to the three men who have been the closest friends of her father's and mine, namely: Hans Van Cleef, George Mayberry, and Paul Godfrey. It is my last wish that these three men should have all rights of legal guardianship—

such as disposal of my properties, direction of her education, and control of her welfare until she shall be of age. This right to come prior to any claims from relatives or nearer of kin. It is also my wish that Nora Kelley, who has had the care of my daughter, Judith Drene, for many years, shall continue in this care until such time as she shall no longer need the services of nurse or companion. This I swear to be my last will and testament; and likewise I swear this to be my valid signature, made in the presence of proper witnesses.

[Signed] MARGARET DRENE.

The doctor and coachman signed for witnesses; and Mr. Mayberry folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

With the thing done that I had started to do, I felt of a sudden weak and shaken; and full of shame at the way I had treated the poor, dying soul.

She had closed her eyes and seemed to be sleeping. The others stole noiselessly out of the room; the doctor took his place by the window and I by the bedside, to smooth her pillows and quiet her going if the need came. But she slept on—unmindful of further pain or care.

At the first ring of day she had her wish. As the gray of the morning broke she slipped over the border; and I knew by the look on her face that she had found him and was not afeared either of what they together would have to be telling Mary. I folded her hands and said a prayer; with one for

Herself as well—that they should be having her better in their keeping than ever before. Then I went down to carry the news to the three, waiting below.

They knew before I had spoken a word and gathered about me, Paul Godfrey taking my hands.

"And how are you going to take care of your childeen—now that you have her?" he asked, a strange smile on his face.

"Work for her," said I. "Moreover, I have a good bit put by to help—what I brought over from Ireland with me and what I have saved the years I have been here."

He wrung my hands and I could see the others were smiling too—though I couldn't be making out at all what their meaning was.

"You can work for her, Nora, but you can save your money. We've been making out another paper—a deed this time—with a real lawyer to make it solid. Judith gets the house and the property—as she should; and we'll forget that her father ever left it any other way," and Paul Godfrey looked at me sharply.

This time it was I that wrung his hands.

"All right," said I, "and while we're forgetting we might as well forget more. What do the three of you say to forgetting the way her father died

and the way the mother went after him because of not enough love to keep her with the child? Sure, those are mortal poor legacies for any one. 'Twould be no great harm done if we lost them before the child grew up to find them—would it, now?"

They gave me their hands by way of promise; and it was agreed then and there that Herself should never be hearing of Mr. Paul's gift to her, of her father's death or her mother's going. But instead we would build a memory for her that should be as sweet as the music her father used to be making on his violin, aye, and as beautiful as her mother's pictures.

And sure, we felt safe in our planning. For with our lips forever closed how would she ever be knowing it was otherwise?

IV

THE KING'S DAUGHTER AND THE SWINEHERD'S WIFE GO ADVENTURING

THE days that followed make a tangled memory; and at best I can but unravel a length here and there, never getting to the end of any one thread.

Buyers came first; and everything that could be sold at the house was sold and taken away. Most of the pictures and books, marbles and violins, went this way. We kept enough of simple furniture to do Herself and myself—wherever we might go—and the rest was packed for city auction.

All through the breaking up the childeen clung to me. Try as we would, there was little merriment in those days for her. She kept closely at my heels wherever I went about the house, asking a hundred times: "You're quite sure, Nora, you're not going—with everybody else?"

And I had to be holding her close and promising a dozen times for each asking.

Death could have little meaning for her; and too many times her father and mother had been away for the separation now to have aught of fearsomeness. But the emptying of the house frightened her; the great rooms left bare and the doors of them closed one by one; and I found her waking in the mornings with a startled cry, as if she had been dreaming of finding herself left alone in the empty house and the dream had crowded her all atremble over the threshold into real life.

The horses and fixings in the stable were sold at once, and the servants dismissed; for there was no longer money coming in for wages, and there was little need of their service, besides. Cook stayed a few days over her time, out of love of the child; sure, every heart was opened wide to her, and her own wee heart never failed to make answer. I was glad of this, for well I knew it would be making friends for her wherever she went; and God knows she would be needing all she could gather.

We had our minds made at the first that it would never do to keep the childeen near her home on the Hudson. There would be too much wagging of tongues and curious meddlers about; aye, and children babbling of what they had heard their elders say. If we were to keep the past forgotten, as we had agreed, we must take her where it had

never been known, or at least where we could jail it.

I was for going to some other small place near the city, where the three guardians could be coming often and where the childeen could be still having the country air she had been raised on; but the three would not agree.

"It's always the little places that gossip the hardest. A week after you have moved in, the whole village would know all that had happened—and more that had never happened. The children would be repeating it to Judith by way of a welcome. No, no, Nora," and Mr. Mayberry shook his finger at me. "If you want to keep your childeen safe from disagreeable legacies take her to the city. It takes a big place to bury big things."

And the others nodded with satisfaction.

"Bring her to us," said Little Hans. "The ones there who know will keep the father's memory pleasant for the child because they honor him as a great man, and because they are gentle folk and would not hurt a child. For those who do not know, a stranger coming or going does not loosen tongues."

A painter had just moved out of a small skylighted lodging in the building where the three had theirs—they called them studios; and it was

agreed at last that the childeen and I should move in.

I dreaded the notion of a city—the noise and the dirt and the shut-inness of it; but I saw the sense of what the three had said. Moreover, there would be a good school there for the childeen. I could be finding work to piece out what was looking to be a lean living for Herself.

I went into town to look the place over first, and I liked it. There were two large rooms at the top of the building, with a bit of a kitchen contrivance off at one end. The great skylight filled the studio room with any sun that might chance to be out and the windows looked over all the other housetops to the river—with the boats coming and going and the green banks beyond. It was a pretty sight; and what with the promise of fresh air and sunshine aplenty, I knew we could not be asking a better place.

I left Herself with Aunt over the moving and putting to rights; and what a time the four of us had, for not one of the three but what must have both hands in it.

As I have said, Paul Godfrey was the only one with money—barring what they made with their music and which seemed to slip through their fingers easier than greased eels; and now his fortune had gone. What came in from the selling of

the treasures and furniture and the house was put out at interest—for it was agreed that we should live on that if we could, and save the money itself for the childeen when she had grown.

There was, therefore, a bare scrapings for us to do with in the matter of fixing a new home. But what we lacked in money we made up in spirit; and sure it was good to see the three with their coats off and their sleeves turned up, and myself bossing the work when I had the chance.

They painted the two rooms from ceiling to floor, for the wood was dark. The landlord would do nothing, and they swore the childeen must have cheerier walls. They painted them white, the color of thick cream, and put soft blue paper on the panels between.

The painter that had moved out had borrowed some money from them which he was too hard up to pay back; so they bargained it off for work and fetched him over to paint birds flying over the blue paper with just a bit of green tree-top showing below.

They were after having my advice about what birds Herself would like best, and, thinking back over the child's years, I said: "Robins—just. And then throstles and corncrakes for Ireland; and Saint Columkill's birds for the journey we're to be taking across the water."

The painter must have been a bit ignorant, for he'd never heard of corncrakes, and had to be painting linnets instead, and I had to be telling him that Saint Columkill's birds were naught but sea-gulls.

Then Little Hans, catching the idea, was for having the panels by the windows finished off with Irish faeries. With myself standing close to give the cut of their coats and caps and the color of their brogans, the painter drew a fair picture of a faery piper on one side and a faery ring on the other, with a wisp of a new moon shining above.

Aye, but it made a pretty room when it was done, and did away with the need of pictures—all but the mother's. We hung that against the white of the wall, across from the windows; and it brought the feeling to me then that we were canonizing her for the child, as you might say, and starting the memory right. We had kept, as well, the father's violin—the one he had not thrown the last night he played. Mr. Godfrey fixed a shelf for it under the mother's picture, the two of them making a kind of a shrine.

"She'll grow up to worship them," he muttered under his breath, as he finished. "Mark my word, by the time she's grown she'll give them the credit for everything good that has ever happened to her; whereas if the truth—"

"Hush," said I. "And why shouldn't she? If you can't be having a father and mother, isn't the next best thing having the memory? And what harm will it do if she grows up thinking it the finest in the world? Sure, 'tis a mean soul entirely who robs the dead."

The last was said under my breath, for my own ears only.

"No harm, I suppose," said he, and he went on to the next piece of work, which was hanging the curtains I had made from the half-worn lace ones in the old music-room.

They were like a parcel of school-boys in the fun-making and pleasure over the work; and like a parcel of old maids in their eagerness to have everything right.

There was nothing too hard for them to be doing that they thought would bring happiness to Herself, or make living more comfortable for us. They stuffed seats for the low windows, aye, and covered them; and it took two to manage a needle between them, Mr. Mayberry looking on with a bottle of witch-hazel in one hand and lint in the other.

They made curtains to draw over the skylight when the sun should be over-strong—at least I did the sewing and they did the connivering; and they matched the wee tea-set with its bands of

gold and scattering of pink rosebuds, as near as they could to a full-grown one, and built in a corner cupboard with glass doors to hold it.

They would have fetched up half the furnishings from their own lodgings if I had let them have their way. I said not a word to a rug and a carved chair of black oak that looked as if it might have once throned a king's daughter; but when Mr. Mayberry came with a heathen idol and Little Hans with horrors that he called war-masks from the Dutch Indies, I laid the geasa on them—as we say in Ireland—that they should fetch no more.

After it was all finished, they brought out the childher from one of the boxes and sat them along the window-seat—in the very same order they had kept in the nursery, after which they tramped through the rooms like haunting ghosts, afeared something might have been forgotten.

Paul Godfrey left early in the afternoon to get the childeen, while the rest of us made ready for tea. For this had been the promise I had left behind with Herself, that when all was ready she should have the three in for the grandest tea-drinking in history.

Aye, and it was. I shall never be forgetting her face when Mr. Godfrey opened the door and pushed her gently in. She stood just over the threshold taking in everything, her hands clasped

tight together and her chin tilted up a wee bit—a way it had when she was excited and pleased.

"It's bea—utiful! I feel just like an enchanted princess," she cried.

"With three terrible dragons to guard you." Mr. Mayberry roared a finish like the demon himself.

"And the old witch-woman to cast spells. Hey, Nora?" and Little Hans grinned all over.

Herself was across the room in an instant, her arms about my neck.

"You sha'n't call my Nora an old witch-woman. She's much—much more like a faery grandmother."

"Then what about tea?" said I, and I whisked into the kitchen contrivance to give a good wiping to my eyes before I should be spoiling it all with glad foolishness.

When I came back with the tea things they were all at the table, Herself in the carved chair at the head, Paul Godfrey at the foot, and the others between them. I stood behind my dearie's chair, with so much pride, watching her pour the cups—remembering how each of them took their tea and never spilling a drop or upsetting a thing.

One minute she was shy with the surprise and strangeness of it all, the next she was laughing and clapping her hands like the childeen of old. Some one was always jumping from the table to show off

his handiwork or some bungle of the other two; and Mr. Mayberry was back at his old tricks.

He brought out a nosegay of pink and white asters from under the table, while a whole shower of chocolates dropped down from the crystal chandelier above her head. There were fancy biscuits from the coat-tails of Mr. Paul's velvet jacket, and a black kitten from under my apron. The childeen had always wanted one, but her mother had no mind for pets and I had always coaxed away the notion by telling her the robins would not build next year in the lilac bush if there was a cat about.

She squealed with delight when Mr. Mayberry tossed it into her lap.

"It's all right now, isn't it, Nora? She can't scare away these birdies, can she? And I can keep her always for my very own."

But I lost my patience with the last of his tricks. What did he do but somehow magic that heathen idol out of the childeen's hat-box. How the rascal managed it I could never be guessing, for I had seen him with my own eyes fetch the grinning thing back to his lodgings. But there it was, a foot high of plain ugliness, being presented with a grand ceremony to Herself. I should have thought the thing would have scared away her wits, but instead she was bobbing it a courtesy and laughing.

"What's his name?"

"He's the Jollyman Geni, of course, the one that always goes with an enchanted palace, dragons, godmothers, and a princess. Just look here," and Mr. Mayberry pointed down the great, ugly mouth.

"He swallows wishes. Instead of rubbing a ring or a lamp when you want him to do anything, you write it on parchment and give it to him to eat. If he swallows it at one gulp you'll have your wish in three days; if it takes two gulps you'll have to wait twice three days."

"Oh!"

The childeen looked half as if she believed—and half as if she didn't. "Will it really come true—anything I wish for that way?" she asked, a bit fearsomely, at last.

Mr. Mayberry nodded solemnly; but I could see Mr. Godfrey trying to reach him with his foot under the table, and scowling fiercely. Little Hans saw too.

"Of course," he said, "there are times when even the best of magic does not good work. On a black Friday—or when it rains before seven—or on the days you up-stumble on the stairs. Is it not so, Mynheer Mayberry?"

The foot must have reached him, for he considered this gravely. "Guess you're right, old

man. Be careful not to wish on black Fridays, Judith."

"But what is a black Friday?"

And seeing small knowledge on the others' faces, I answered for them, "Sure, 'tis the Friday the fish is burnt."

It was nearly dark before they finished their tea. The childeen's face was flushed and tired with all the excitement, so I hurried the three away.

After they had gone we stood for a minute looking out together over the housetops to the river, Herself nestling her face against my apron while the two arms circled about me.

"We're not so very far from everything as it used to be, Nora. There are the boats going up—the very ones we'd be seeing after a while from the house; and there are the ones going to sea—going to Ireland—and we're just between. And there's mother, there, and father's violin, and the three close by, and you and me. It's almost like going on just the same."

"Aye, just the same," and I said it truthfully. For what more had her mother been but a beautiful picture, just, and her father but music? For the rest—she should never feel much of a difference, please God!

And sure, God and good luck were with us. It

wasn't long before I had gathered in enough work to piece out a fair living for the two of us, and choke the wolf's howling for all time. As far as I could be seeing, there would be no need of touching her money, or my bit in the bank; and it would be safe against a rainy day, or, as the saying goes in Ireland, against the time when the famine walks.

Ours was a building of lodgings or studios, rented for the most part by musicians and artists, lone men like the three. It wasn't long before the most of them were bringing me their mending, and I was keeping them darned, patched, and pressed by the month at two dollars apiece.

Besides this, there were the evening parties; some one was sure to be having one in the week, and I could be slipping down after the childeen was asleep and help serve.

I had precious visions of Aunt's face if she had ever heard of these doings; and I'll not deny myself that there were times when the Kelley pride gripped me uncomfortably hard. But sure, the things you'd never be doing for yourself are easy doing for another; and the Irish in me kept me laughing down any bit of disagreeableness that might happen.

Before a six months had passed we knew every one in the building and the half had been to our

dun, as I named our two rooms and the kitchen contrivance; although being as it was a women's apartment, I might better have called it the *grianàn*. They would come, fetching their mending, and bide awhile to chat. At first this muddled my conscience some; for wasn't I minding too well how careful her mother had been to keep the childeen away from people who might be spoiling her manners or crumpling her morals. But for the life of me I could see no real hurt in the neighboring.

They were all of them middling young or middling old, good lads at heart; and I soon came to be seeing that they rarely stayed unless they were lonesome or troubled or down on their luck and needed a bit of heartening. So I had it out with myself once and for all one day, and said, said I:

"Nora, *amhic*, this is a country of equal feelings, honest opinions, and square dealing; and those that are raised in greenhouses will be finding it mortal hard later to grow well in the open. Moreover, 'tis a country where lads and lasses begin early to work and play shoulder to shoulder; and the sooner your childeen learns men along with books, the sooner she'll be understanding them and herself.

"Sure, you and the three can keep an eye out

on the reading and see that she gets the best while she's young; and then if it happens by and by that by mistake she picks up something foolish or weak—aye, or even bad, having no taste for it, she'll drop it quick enough, with no hurt to her but sorrow that such things need be at all.

"But if, instead, you keep ever barring her door against everything that isn't ticketed 'perfectly harmless' you'll be teaching her two bad things in a woman—fear and curiosity."

I argued so-fashion with my conscience and cleared it in the end, and I was never a hand to stir up trouble again once it was laid.

And so it happened as I am telling it, just, that like the king's daughter and the swineherd's wife, we went adventuring; only ours were adventures in human nature, neighboring, and for the most part they took place in our skylighted *dun*.

There are two adventures that stand out like cairns on a hillside; and the first was the one with Cuchulain. Of course you are not to be thinking that was his name, but it was the one he went by in the *dun* and it stays on in the memory.

For the sake of those who may not be knowledgeable in Irish history, I would be telling that Cuchulain was one of the heroes of the Red Branch of Ulster, a brave man and a faithful

knight. But like many another after him he could not be contented with goodness alone until he had tasted food of a different sort.

So he wandered away one day after a foolish faery woman. He followed her into the land of Forgetfulness; and left Emer, the woman he loved, to mourn him many a weary day. Of course he came back to her; and knowing his heart was still clean, she was wise enough to meet him with love and few questions. That's ever the way with a sensible woman if she would not drive her man from a wish to taste badness out of curiosity to craving as a steady diet.

We had been in the *dun* a couple of months when Cuchulain came of a late afternoon, the full of his arms of mending.

He stood uncertain a minute on the threshold. "Miss—Kelley?" said he.

"Nora, just," said I.

"Nora of the needle," he laughed. "I hear you've been mending up the other chaps. Can you take on another?"

"Sure, and I can. Will you step in a minute? Maybe there are instructions."

He dropped the pile in a chair beside my basket where he could see I had been working; but instead of the instructions his eye caught the room. With a cry of pleasure he seemed to

forget me along with the mending and went about looking at everything.

I took a turn at looking myself and saw he was middling young, brushing forty. His hair had a gray thatch over the temples, the kind that betters a man's looks; his eyes were clear and there was no shifting in their gaze, while the chin was firm. Only the mouth twisted a bit discontentedly, and I could be telling then that the taste in it was far from satisfying.

"Maybe you're not knowing it yourself," thought I, "but you've got the wrong dish of food to your lips, and unless I'm greatly mistaken, you're not the man that will ever be liking it."

I could see he was pleased with the painting of birds and faeries; and he laughed again when he came abreast of the window-seat where the childher sat.

"You've a large family to keep, Nora. Doesn't it ever get—discouraging?"

I shook my head. "They're not mine, though I've had a hand at raising them."

"The little girl's—" He looked over his shoulder as if he expected to see Herself behind him.

"She's away with her three guardians. And the mending?" For I wasn't of a wish to talk about the childeen to a stranger.

"Poor little tad." He said it half under his

breath, still looking at the childher. "If the tales about Charles Drene and his wife are true, I reckon their daughter must take more kindly to offspring than ever they did."

"Maybe," said I, feeling suddenly grim. "But supposing the next time you are hearing any of those tales you remind the one that's telling them that there's only a wisp of a childeen left to inherit them and it wouldn't be a bad notion to pass on instead of some pleasant things of the man and his wife—tales you might be glad your child, if you had one, would be remembering of you some day."

For some reason he winced at this, and was as glad to get back to the mending as I was.

The next time he came 'twas a dreary, mid-winter day. Hail was rattling against the sky-light, and the childeen and I were already lighting the candles and fetching the tea things to break the gloom of the early-gathering dusk. I could see at a glimpse that the man was down-spirited from the day, or some bad news, maybe. He looked older and grayer, and the mouth had more of a twist to it.

His face brightened, though, when he saw Herself, and his mouth straightened out in a nice smile; so that I made out I had to be taking a few more stitches before his things would be ready

and asked him to wait and have tea. And as I watched the two from across the table I was glad.

They made a great game of the tea-drinking, playing that he was some weary, lost traveler on a dark road, who had stumbled over the threshold of the good faeries' palace and been taken in.

Every morsel they ate was enchanted; and sure I was thinking it must be, for the look of the bad taste was gone from his mouth in a twinkling, and I was thinking he had found a dish at last more to his liking.

"And good faeries always grant a wish to lost travelers before they send them out in the dark again," he said to her as he was leaving.

"P'raps I could, just one. Do you think I could, Nora?" and the childeen pulled eagerly at my apron.

"Aye, maybe—it would matter a bit what the wish was."

"It belongs to the simplest class of wishes—the kind that could come true. Would the faery promise to keep her candles lighted and take in the traveler the next time he gets lost in the dark?"

The childeen clapped her hands.

"That's an easy wish to bring true. We'll promise, won't we, Nora?" And the promise was made.

Just then the three came over the threshold. Sure, a blind gander could have seen the change in Cuchulain and the coldness in the greetings between them. He took his mending and went out, the twist back in his mouth; while the three circled her chair and, for the first time, looked the dragons they were always playing at.

Nothing was said then; but after the childeen had gone to bed they came trailing back, the three of them, looking for all the world like a parcel of constables after a tinker. They fetched over chairs and sat down by me where I was mending.

"The weather's been abominable all day," said Mr. Godfrey, cocking his head toward the skylight that was still rattling with the hail.

"Ach, I saw the most of twelve up-split umbrellas about the street," and Little Hans smiled broadwise.

"I am glad," announced Mr. Mayberry with the solemn face on him, "that you have so much sewing to do. I know the work keeps you contented and I'm sure I don't know what we poor chaps ever did before you came."

"Is that so? But it doesn't happen to be weather or umbrellas or mending, either, that fetched you away from your pipes to-night. Out with it now—what's ailing?"

I asked it as if I hadn't a fair-sized notion already of the truth.

The two looked toward Mr. Mayberry, who was clearing his throat.

"I wonder," he said, slowly, "if we have, any of us, a thought or an idea tucked away in the chimney-corners of our minds that Nora doesn't get at beforehand. See here, Nora, how did it happen that you asked that fellow, of all people, to stay and have tea with Judith? Don't you know what he is?"

"He's a gentleman," said I, firmly.

"Perhaps he was, once. But he's not been going the way of a gentleman since he moved in here."

"I'm sorry to hear it; but I'll never be believing it if you don't keep reminding me of it every now and again."

"This isn't a joking matter. God knows we're not prudish folk, and the last to be mauling a chap's character if he's half-way decent. But we can't have that sort round Judith; and it's up to you to keep him the other side of the door, or—"

"Aye," said I, "or what?"

"Or we'll have him put out of the building."

It was a sock of Mr. Mayberry's that I happened to be mending that minute, and I bayoneted it well with the full length of the needle before I put

it down. I'll not be denying I was wishing there was some of Mr. Mayberry himself inside the sock.

"Wait a minute before we argue the matter. Suppose you tell me, just, what sort of a man he is. You needn't be looking about for pretty words, either, for I'm an old enough woman to stand plain speaking."

"You tell her, Paul. You know more about the fellow than I do," and Mr. Mayberry shifted the telling on to Mr. Godfrey.

"Well," said he, thoughtful-like, "I suppose you would say he was a chap who had lost his way—got mired."

"Aye, he was saying something of the kind, himself," but I said this under my breath and Mr. Godfrey went straight on, the others nodding their heads as if they would swear to the truth of all he was saying.

"He came here from some place in the West, where he'd been the leader of a little orchestra and the composer of some few songs and marches—not bad stuff. It's an old story, old as the city itself. He got in with a fast lot and became popular.

"For a year he's been writing rotten stuff, songs for the cabarets, and going with the women that sing them and the crowd that listens to them. There isn't a worse life in America—or

anywhere else—for a man with any decency. It drains his ambition and his talent, if he has any, dryer than chips; and it rots his self-respect and his judgment."

"I'll wager he doesn't like it, though," said I.

"That isn't the question," broke in Mr. Mayberry. "He's no fit company for you or Judith. It made my blood boil to see him here laughing with the child; and the question is—are you going to keep him away or do we put him out?"

"I have always heard," said I, "that 'tis the decent women that are always hardest on the woman that is down; and the rule holds the same with men, I'm thinking."

"You haven't heard it all yet, Nora. The man is married—there's a nice wife and some children back in the West, and he won't go to them or send for them to come here. Jacobs, of the fourth floor, says he's heard that the poor woman is eating her heart out over the drifts of gossip that reach her."

"'Tis no great wonder," said I. "Aye, and it's easy seeing how it happened. He's like Cuchulain of old. He couldn't be refusing the call of the faery woman and taking a peep for himself into the Land of Forgetfulness. And once he'd had his head in and tasted his fill, he was afeared to tell the wife, or fetch her here for any one else to tell her. Any one with half an eye can see the poor

man is sick of his choosing and would give the whole of his popularity to get out of it."

"Why doesn't he, then?" Mr. Godfrey's voice wasn't overburdened with sympathy.

"The saints defend us, man! Do you think that's so easy done? You mark my word, decent folks and decent ways are denied him—the same as you'd be denying him the door here.

"Faith, what do you do with a coat that gets musty and dust-dragged? You hang it, airing in the sun, don't you? And what's better for musty, dusty minds and hearts? Air and sunshine, pleasant places, good company, kind words, till the breath won't come free in foul places. But the trouble is decent folks are denying these just when a poor soul needs them the most, for fear the fresh air won't go round and the sunshine might be getting a bit tarnished from the touch of him."

"I don't believe that's so. Men are always glad to give a chap a hand up, if they're sure he wants to come."

"Well, suppose you don't wait this time to be sure, but give Cuchulain a chance to pull himself back. As for the childeen—what harm can come to her? And what are we, you three and I, to hinder the child, small as she is, from doing her share in the world's mending? Tell me that."

In the end I had my way, and Cuchulain came

often. To be sure, there was always the excuse of the mending; and I'm of the honest opinion there was many a hole I sewed that was put in by himself with the help of his own knife.

When the childeen was there the two of them would play or he would get her to read from one of her books; but often he would bide when I was alone and talk, or get me to tell him a bit of Irish faery lore.

Sometimes he was strangely happy; sometimes I could feel that his heart was knocking the heels of his boots. I mind well the day he came, his face flushed like a boy's, and dragged me after him down the two flights of stairs to his studio to play me the bit of an Irish song he had just made out of something I had told him. It was as full of sweetness as the song of a mating throstle; and how his eyes sparkled when he saw I liked it!

"It's good," said he, proudly. "The first bit of good music I've made in months, Nora."

"Aye, 'tis every bit good enough to send home to the wife and make her gladsome." We had never spoken of the wife between us before; but I was thinking the time was ripe.

He looked at me oddly, then fell to the music again; and I left him there at his piano, softly running the melody over and over, repeating it almost like a telling of beads when the heart is

troubled. I didn't see him for a week after that; and when he came again, faith he was that down he looked like a man trailing his own winding-sheet. Standing by the door, he looked mournful at the two of us.

"Has the good faery a lighted candle for the lost traveler, to-night?" he asked.

"Wait a minute, and I'll have two lighted."

The childeen skipped across the room and had candles fetched in a twinkling. She put them at the corners of the tea-table and lighted them; then she skipped back to the door and bobbed him one of her little courtesies.

"Welcome, Sir Traveler, and have you brought a wish this time?"

"That's just it. I was afraid to bring it."

"Maybe you'd like to go back for it?"

He shook his head. "The truth is, I'm afraid to wish it."

"Then let Nora and me wish it for you."

"I'm even afraid to do that. You see—I'm afraid, I'm afraid to have it come true."

The childeen stood on tiptoe and considered him gravely. "Is it such a bad wish? You couldn't wish any harm to anybody, could you?"

"That's why I'm afraid to wish—I can't quite be sure whether I'd be bringing harm to any one—or happiness."

The childeen still looked at him puzzled-like.

"I tell you what," she said at last. "Drop the wish in the Jollyman," and she pointed to the heathen idol Mr. Mayberry had given her. "Daddy May says any wish he swallows will come true. Leave it to him. If he swallows it, it will be all right."

But Cuchulain still shook his head, and turned the talk to other things. But my mind did not turn with it. As I went back and forth from the table to the kitchen contrivance, fetching tea, the feeling gripped me harder and harder that he was wishing for the courage to send for the wife, but feared what would come of it. And as I stood behind the childeen's chair, serving the two, I took suddenly the notion to tell the tale of Cuchulain and see what virtue there was, after all, in tales.

"And you think, Nora, that all women would be like that Emer?" he asked, when it was finished.

"'Twould depend a bit on how great had been the love between them, and whether she knew in her heart that her man had not over-much liking for the doings in the Land of Forgetfulness."

"But would she believe that?"

"I'm thinking she would—if it was true."

"But wouldn't the memory of the land be haunting them both for the rest of their lives—

a ghostly shadow between them—keeping them always apart?"

"Faith, it wouldn't be so hard for him to lay the ghost with patience and love aplenty if he came anywhere near the measure of a real man. And what's more—it wouldn't be long before she was helping him."

He smiled at this, leaving soon after with the wish still unwished on his lips, aye, and in his heart as well. Herself curled up in my lap that night, before bed; and her face looked troubled.

"What was the wish, Nora? And what was all the talk about Cuchulain? I know you've guessed. Daddy May says you find out everything just like a real faery godmother."

I hugged my dearie. It was vain and foolish I was growing, I knew well; but I was ever hungry for words of praise and love from her. At first I wondered how much of what was in my mind I had best tell her.

"This is the way of it," I began, "and it's a poor tale that doesn't be coming true every hundred years or oftener for some one else."

"And is the tale of Cuchulain true for him?"

"Well, the city's been his Land of Forgetfulness, that's certain, and yonder, somewhere, there's the wife and children waiting for him to remember."

"Oh!"

She sat very still for a while, thinking it out; then of a sudden she clapped her hands.

"Think how splendid when he comes—how happy they'll be! And I'm so glad for him—he always seemed so lonely with no one to belong to him. But I don't understand the wish—what was there to be afraid of?"

"Maybe he's wishing to go back, but is afeared they won't be glad to see him."

"Not glad?" Her eyes went quickly to the picture and the violin on the wall.

"That's silly," she said; "just as if there's a child in the whole world who wouldn't be glad to have a father coming back to her."

The next morning I saw her writing on a scrap of paper; and as we were going for school I saw her slip something down the mouth of the idol. I could hardly wait to be getting back to see what was in there; for I knew if it was a wish, and if it was to come true, no time should be wasted getting at it. I tried a dozen things before I could fetch it out—it was a pair of knitting-needles that did the trick at last; and I read on the bit of paper:

Dear jollyman this is my first wish and you are to please make it come true at once send cuhoolin back to the wife and children

JUDITH.

I lost no time in fetching the wish to Cuchulain himself.

"Read that," said I, slipping him the paper. "You can see she's made the wish for you. You'll have to be promising, now, to make it come true in three days or she'll be losing her faith in the idol entirely—and—I'll have—" I stopped.

"You'll what?" said he, smiling, with the twist all gone from his mouth.

"This is Friday—and I'll have to be burning the fish. That's what!"

And I needn't be telling any one that the wish came true.

V

MORE ADVENTURING

"THERE'S a new lady lodger!"

Herself announced it as she came in from one of her outings with the three, her hands clasped and chin in air.

I could be seeing she was full of the news; and it was news indeed, this coming of a lady lodger into our building of bachelors.

Not but that there had been a scattering of them before; but barring ourselves they had not been encouraged, and had never stayed long. Whenever a new one appeared there was always much talk occasioned, especially by Herself. I knew she was always hoping that it might mean the coming as well of another child—a playmate for herself; for although she had grown-up companionship aplenty, she was often wanting some one of her own age.

The three borrowed children by the day whenever they could from fellow-musicians or distant

relatives; but it was generally a feast or a famine of children with us. We would have the *dun* filled with them from breakfast to tea-time and then not see another for months. It was the steady neighboring with one that I knew the childeen hungered for—and I would have wagered a sixpence that was in her mind when she came in with the news.

"And what is this one like?" I asked, for it is hard for young tongues to hold news untold for long.

"We don't know—that's why it's so exciting. Nobody's seen her—'cepting Joe; and everybody's heard something different about her. Little Hans says she must be the new Dutch contralto that's just come over; Joe says she's pretty and smiles so nicely every time he brings her up in the lift; and I—I heard her crying just now when I came by her door. She's in 705—just opposite the elevator."

I shook my head at the child.

"You'd not have Nora believe that the young lady of the *dun* has been standing with her ear to a strange keyhole?"

The childeen flushed.

"Honestly, Nora—I'd never have stopped only I was afraid it was crying I heard, and I wanted to be quite sure. Don't you think we ought to do something?"

She looked troubled as well as excited.

"If she's Dutch—why not be leaving that to Little Hans?"

"Why, he just couldn't—he doesn't know her. But perhaps if we began he might go on—"

The laugh broke from me.

"Faith—so that's the way the birds fly! And you and Little Hans have been connivering to put more trouble on Nora?"

"No, we haven't. He just said he thought she hadn't any friends here, and probably didn't know English very well, and might feel dreadfully lonesome. He's been trying to get the conductor to present him—you know she sings first with the Philharmonic—but he's always missed her, and the rehearsals haven't begun yet."

I pulled the childeen down on my lap. She was fast growing out of it; the tips of her boots touched the floor and her hair-ribbon brushed my nose; but for all that it was still the way we liked best to be talking matters over.

"Maybe," said I, "it's not Dutch manners to go knocking at doors when ladies are wailing."

"We needn't know that. I could just happen there. Couldn't I carry her some tea? What are we going to have to-night?"

"Well, what would you say, now, to a short-bread and marmalade?" and I named over the things she liked best.

"Little Hans likes chocolate better than tea." She wrinkled up her wee forehead as if her head had been bursting with puzzlement. "Perhaps, over there, chocolate is more stylish than tea?"

"Then let's be stylish. 'Twould be a pity, just, to start Little Hans in wrong with the lady," and I dumped her out of my lap to get things ready.

She skipped about, fixing a tray, and in a few minutes it was filled and I was opening the door and watching Herself across the hall, her face beaming above the steaming tray. I could hear her wee tap on the door, and her, "Please, it's Judith. May I come in?" Then the door swung closed on her, and I stepped back over our own threshold.

We had been over two years in the *dun;* the child was past ten and already making life for herself. 'Tis a wonderful thing—that: the watching of a wee soul groping out to take a firm hold of life. At first I was wishing I might always be making it for her, keeping it pleasant and comfortable, and the ugly, hurting things out of her way; but I knew now I was glad I could not be having my wish.

I could no more have crippled her hold than I would have kept her always a nestling size for my lap. I could tell then, by the eager, thirsting way she reached out to new people and fresh

doings, that she would drink deep of every brew life might put before her; and, sure, I was glad of it. For what sort of a gift is life to any one that fears to drink, aye, and drain?

I might be weeping for her over the bitter brews; but I'd never raise my hand to take the cup from her. There's no virtue in that for any one. It is sure to be leaving them wishful for what has been left at the bottom or spilled, and hating you for the spilling. Instead, I'd be searching about for a sweeter brew to be taking the taste of the bitter out of her mouth, when the need came.

All this was in my mind that night, and I was glad to be knowing that she was for going adventuring in no half-hearted fashion. She had a joyous way of her own in meeting whatever came up with her; and the silent times had grown less. Her cheeks were still like soft thorn bloom and her hair the color of corn; but no longer were the curls flying free. We fastened them now at the back with a ribbon, and I was lengthening her skirts every three months.

She had kept all the prettiness of the child—and added to it; and I was forever counting her beauty and her dear ways, as a mother might count her daughter's dowry, against the time when Himself should come a-wooing. Aye, and there was

more to the dowry than that, just; I mind well the day that I marked it plain.

It was of a Sunday afternoon, and the three had brought the childeen back from the concert, along with a gathering of others—many of them old friends of her father's. Have I told it before, I wonder, that Little Hans and Mr. Godfrey played in the Philharmonic? Mr. Godfrey was one of the first violins, while Little Hans played the first 'cello. The childeen always went with them; and afterward they generally came to the *dun* to make more music and finish with tea.

They were the rare times, those. Often and often they would play four, six, eight, together, with Mr. Mayberry at the piano, the childeen and I listening from the window-seat. What was in the childeen's mind I could never be telling; but strange as it may sound, the music, whether full of sorrow or gladness, always played me straight to the hills of Ireland, Herself still by my side.

They had finished a long piece, just, when one of the musicians, a stranger to us, called over:

"And what is Miss Judith going to be when she grows up? A great artist—a great violinist like her father—hey?"

She answered him with a shaking of curls.

"A pianist—a harpist—a 'cellist, like our Hans, here, then?"

Still a shaking of curls.

The stranger smiled:

"Surely we're going to be something great, though—an artist of some sort?"

"I don't know." The childeen spoke as if she were thinking the matter over for the first time. "I don't believe I want to be great. I guess—I guess I'll just be a mother. That 'll take most of my time," and she finished with a nod of the head as if it was all settled.

I couldn't be keeping my eyes away from the three. They were looking hard at her; Little Hans smiling gently, but the two others were as sober as court judges.

It was then I said to myself: "Nora, *amhic*, sure that would make a fair adding to her dowry. If Himself turns out the man I take him to be, he'd be counting that rich in the woman he marries."

But, sure, my tongue runs on like a goose in a blind alley—here and there and getting nowhere. And it's entirely forgetting, I am, that I should be waiting in the *dun* for the childeen to come back with an empty tray and more news of the lady lodger.

She came, her chin all aquiver with eagerness, as I knew well it would be. Putting down the tray, she pushed me into my chair and climbed into my lap.

"She's simply bea—utiful, Nora darling; and I'm so glad you let me go."

"Then she was crying?"

"Her eyes were all red—and there was a tiny tear right on the end of her nose."

"Aye, she must have been beautiful," said I.

Herself slapped my cheek softly, a coaxing way she had.

"Now, Nora, please don't tease—there's such a lot to tell. I didn't think at first she was glad to see me, but I knew she would be in just a minute, so I went in and closed the door behind me. That sort of settled everything.

"She speaks in the funniest, dearest way—sounds like baby-talk. And she *is* the Dutch contralto—and she *is* lonely—and she hasn't any real friends—and she's had a dreadful, dreadful time ever since she came."

The news stopped here only because the childeen's breath had gone.

"Well, she's knowing she's found a friend now, at any rate," said I.

"Two—three. I've told her all about you and Little Hans. She's promised to come in to-morrow for tea—chocolate—with just us. Oh, Nora darling, I've got the loveliest idea!"

But the loveliest idea didn't appear just then. I was thinking of the chocolate.

"So chocolate was more stylish? I can be seeing the bottom of the cup, aye, and the pattern of every plate on the tray, which is a good American sign, if it isn't a Dutch one, that the lady was hungry and liked what you fetched her."

"Starved!"

The childeen's hands were clasped of a sudden.

"That's been one of the dreadful things. You see—she's had to take her meals in restaurants and places and people have spoken to her—gentlemen. She doesn't understand when people speak quickly and she says perhaps they were just meaning to be kind; but it frightens her. And to-night she just couldn't get up her courage to go out for dinner. That's why she was crying—so hungry and lonely and almost wishing she hadn't come at all."

"Why did she come?"

"To make her name and her fortune, I s'pose. She told me all about her home and her little brothers and sisters—nine! Just think of that, Nora. She's the oldest—and not so very old, either.

"She says her mother was to have come with her—she's never been away from her before; but one of the children got very sick just as they were leaving, and she had to come alone. She has friends—German friends—here, but they haven't

come back from somewhere. That's why she's so alone. And I've got the loveliest idea!"

There was no denying the idea this time.

"All right," said I. "If it turns out as well as your wish for Cuchulain, I'll have no objections."

For wasn't Cuchulain back again in the city, not in the studio, mind you, but in a bit of a house close by; the wife and children with him and all going well? Aye, even better than in the old tale.

Herself considered a moment thoughtfully:

"I guess it will turn out just as nice. It's to have Little Hans marry the Dutch Lady."

I jumped.

"It's a bit sudden-like, isn't it? And what's more—the two parties most interested might not be taking strong to each other. What ever put that notion into your head at all, dearie?"

"Oh, it just popped in. I was thinking how sorrowful it was for her—all alone—afraid to eat because strange gentlemen spoke to her. And then I thought of Little Hans—so worried about her, and such a good person to look after any one—and then I thought how fond they both were of children—"

"And how were you finding that out?"

"Oh, I wasn't finding it out—I just know it. You could see the way she spoke of the little

'brooders and sistern' that she was just crazy 'bout them; and you know how Little Hans is always threatening to adopt the childher. And both Dutch! Why, Nora darling, they're just meant to be married!"

"Maybe, but I'd not be saying anything to themselves about it yet. It might spoil the notion for them, and that would be a pity."

"I wasn't going to. I thought we'd keep it a secret—you and I. And when it's 'most settled we'll put another wish in the Jollyman and then tell them about everything!"

"Faith, I'd not be doing that, either. 'Tis queer, but folks are generally more pleased with the arrangement if they're after thinking they've made it themselves. 'Twould be better, just, to keep it a secret to the end, and never let on to any one but the idol, yonder."

"And you'll help?"

"Aye."

"And we'll begin to-morrow?"

And she hugged me tight for the answer I made.

There is no doubt about the virtue of a good beginning; and, sure, a blind gander could be seeing the promise for the two as they sat jabbering Dutch at each other over the chocolate-cups. The length of their smiles would have reached from the courting stile to the chapel—as the saying goes in

Killymard; with Herself and myself looking on ready to cry the banns.

It was a rare chance for Little Hans. He had feeling of proper chaperonage along with the freedom of private conversation; and with the hopes of keeping the course of love, for once, running smooth, I put in a supply of chocolate next day from the grocer's and the childeen gave them a steady invitation to drink with us every afternoon. But, sure, there is more to a saying than the words, just.

For a fortnight Love steered his craft over an oiled sea. The supply of chocolate was gone; Little Hans had dined her in all the best restaurants with Herself present to lay the tongue of Mrs. Grundy.

In the early evenings the Dutch Lady lilted for us in the *dun* like a marsh full of larks, and Little Hans pulling away at his meerschaum, his eyes bursting with pipe-dreams. It all looked as simple as a tale when you've reached the last page and can see "finis" at the bottom. And I was much of the same thinking when Herself announced, at the end of the fortnight, that she thought it was 'most time to plan for the wedding.

"We'll have it in the *dun*, Nora darling; it's a bea—utiful place for a wedding. Daddy May will write special music for some of the friends from

the Philharmonic to play. I'll be bridesmaid, and Brother Paul best man; and you—"

"Sure, I'll serve chocolate," said I. "Having got my hand in so well, 'twould be a pity, I'm thinking, to change my occupation for the once."

And then—whist! Out of a clear sky trouble blew. It rocked the craft about something terrible, 'til Love hadn't a notion which harbor he was making and was sick with the fear of being wrecked entirely.

It began at the first rehearsal of the Philharmonic for the concert when the Dutch Lady was to make her début. Like many an artist before her, she had come over under the management of a manager whose way it was to make no contract until he had so disheartened the newcomer that she—or he, as the case might be—would sign at last at very low terms. The object was to get them, like the goose in the faery-tale, to lay golden eggs for a season at least in the manager's pocket.

This process of disheartenment was not a pleasant one, especially for a lady alone in a strange land. I had often heard the three tell of like cases. How the time of the music would be changed, the singer accused of making mistakes in the score, of singing too loud or too low—and a

dozen such disagreeable things, till the heart was near out of her and she had little courage left for making her success. The Dutch Lady was treated much after this fashion at her rehearsals; and for every bit of courtesy the director lacked she made Little Hans pay twice over.

They sat over their chocolate-cups a last time, and it was sour Dutch that fell from their tongues. At least it sounded sour and hers did most of the dropping. Little Hans sat holding a half-drunk cup, and looking as miserable as a vagabond tinker before the county magistrate. 'Twas the first time I ever missed a smile ready at the corners of his mouth—though it was not the last—by many a week.

With a final lashing of Dutch and a toss of the head, the Lady put down the cup, kissed the childeen, and was gone. And the next day her German friends came to town and carried her off to their home.

Sure, again I was knowing there was more to the phrase "Dutch dander" than the words, just; so I faced fate squarely and ordered tea from the grocer's.

But not so with Herself. She was heartbroken at having the wedding turn out a divorce before the courting was over, as you might say. And what with her moping and Little Hans looking

as if the magistrate had sentenced him for life, the *dun* was anything but cheery.

Then Fate turned clown and did a clever trick; although it was not until the worriment was over that any of us saw the humor of it. Somehow he doled out to Herself as bad a bronchial cold as you could pick up anywhere in the dust of a city; and for days she tossed about on her bed, flushed with fever, and pneumonia hovering near by.

We took turns nursing, the three and I. They were old hands at it by this time, for the childeen had had the usual run of children's ailments, but never had we nursed before with such fearsomeness.

She was a bit better the night of the concert, and nothing would do but Little Hans must take the pennies out of her bank and buy a wee bunch of flowers for the Dutch Lady. I propped her up on the pillows while she wrote on a card:

> These are to tell you that we have missed you dreadfully, and wish you a wonderful night of happiness and success.
> From-JUDITH-who-can't-be-there-because-she's-sick.

Of course it was not Little Hans who presented the flowers—I was knowing well he would never get that close to her. For wasn't he Dutch, too?

He gave them, instead, to Mr. Godfrey, who delivered them, with news of Judith besides; and the Dutch Lady wore the flowers pinned to her

dress. For the first encore they gave her she sang a cradle-song that Judith had loved best of anything she had lilted in the *dun;* and the critics said next morning that was what marked the beginning of her success.

She came to the *dun* the next day, the full of her arms of tulips, pink and white ones, because they were the flowers of her country.

I let her see the childeen for a minute; and couldn't any one be telling then, the way she huddled on the floor by my dearie, her arms about her and crooning words of pity and love mixed in the two tongues, that here was a woman with a heart made for children? So deep was she in the childeen, that she came and went with never a glimpse of Little Hans, standing all the while on the one foot in the shadow of the curtains.

After that, she came every day while the child was mending; and the two were forever stumbling upon each other. If Little Hans were there first, he'd slip across the room and busy himself with a book or some music until she was gone.

I mind he spent an hour on the window-seat with the childher; and I found them afterward, every one of them, on their knees. I was wondering were they praying for the sins of Dutch ladies—or the hopes of Dutch men?

If the Lady was first she would gather up her

things in a twinkling and be gone before Little Hans had barely time to get both feet over the door-sill. And there were no greetings between them.

"I'm getting awfully tired, Nora," Herself said one day.

"Of being sick, dearie? Sure, you'll be out in another week or ten days."

"No, it's not that. I'm tired of waiting for things to happen."

"I'm not surprised," said I, knowing what was in her mind. "Do you think, now, you might help matters along?"

"I'm just crazy to try. It's dreadful to watch them being so—so horrid to each other; and all the time I know they want to be nice."

The day that followed brought the Dutch Lady first; and a half-hour later when Little Hans came in I saw Herself fasten both hands tight round the Lady's arm, and draw her back to the couch again.

"I'm not going to let you run away until you and Little Hans have made up."

Slipping one of her own wee hands into the Lady's, she reached out the other to Little Hans. The next minute I saw her clasping the two together.

"Now you must promise to be friends forever and ever."

"I promise," said the Dutch Lady, blushing like a rose of Killarney and smiling.

Little Hans did nothing but look, but he did that to the queen's taste.

"And now Nora will make us some chocolate, and we'll have one of our good old times," said the childeen, clapping her hands.

"Nora 'll do nothing of the kind," said I. "Chocolate's too heavy for steady drinking and it makes a body thick-headed, aye, and slow-blooded. What you'll be having this time is a good cup of tea—with lemon in it."

And that's what they drank.

That night another wish went in the Jollyman —a wish for a wedding in the *dun*. I lost no time in showing it to Little Hans.

"You've got three days," said I, "to fix things right. And you'll prove yourself a pretty poor sort, with all the help you've had, if you can't be finishing alone like a man."

He stuffed the wish into his pocket and grinned with as much foolishness as a lad in his teens off for his first courting.

"You are the brick, Nora. And what am I to let a gentleman like that," and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the heathen idol, "go back on his word."

So the wedding came about as the childeen had

first planned it. Mr. Paul stood up with the groom and Herself stood with the bride; and never have I seen a prettier sight than those two as they came across the room, hedged with palms and pink tulips.

Herself, first, with a crown of wee rosebuds on her curls, her eyes sparkling and her chin aquiver with the wonder and the gladness of such an ending to an adventure; and then—the Lady. In her shining white and the misty veil she seemed a very walking promise of sweet, true womanhood. And the friends of Little Hans played the music Mr. Mayberry had made for them.

I had thought all along that it was kindness, just, and love for the two that had made the childeen so keen for this ending. But before it was over I was finding out I was not so wise or so far-seeing as I had the pride to think sometimes. Herself had a fish to fry, as the saying goes. Many of the guests had gone, the two were leaving, and Herself went up to kiss them good-by.

"I hope," said she, solemn-like and clinging to their hands—"I hope dreadfully that you'll have a lot of babies. Nora likes to take care of them best of anything, and I've waited so long for some real children to play with."

It was what you might call a breath-holding moment. We stood like a parcel of mutes gasp-

ing at the wishfulness of a little child. Then the Lady put us to shame. Without blush or stammer of tongue she gathered the childeen's face between her hands and looked at it so tenderly.

"That ees what Leetle Hans and I so weesh. And the leetle first girl—shall we call Judith? You like that?"

VI

THE CHILDEEN STEALS OUT AS THE WOMAN CREEPS INTO THE DUN

SO long ago it is that memory has dulled, I cannot be remembering when first the feeling took me that, in some strange way, the childeen's happiness would be mixed up with her passion for music and the worshiping of her father and mother.

For the memory of them had grown to a worship. Every happiness of childhood she could remember she had come to trail back to her mother and the love she bore for Herself. There was not a slither of vanity to the child, but she loved, just to be loved; and it pleased her whenever she was thought winsome and kindful, laying whatever attractions she had to her mother's doing.

Such is the magic of time that those early years of barren motherhood had been wiped away as completely as if they had never been, and in their place had been painted a picture of love and nurt-

uring to match the beauty of that picture on the wall of the *dun*. I have seen the childeen looking at it as if it were the picture of the Holy Mother herself.

Everything that was brave and fine in a gentleman she believed true of her father. She was never tired of getting the three to talk of him; and I mind her saying more than once:

"And he never failed a friend or any one who trusted him, did he?"

And it was always Mr. Godfrey who answered her: "Never, Judith. Never, as long as he lived."

Often and often she would stand under the picture, her hands softly patting the case of the violin; and then, as if she was unlatching the door of a shrine, she would raise the fastenings and let her fingers slide softly up and down the strings until they would give forth a soft, crooning hum. Often and often, watching her, I would wonder what was in her mind, but it was years before she ever put her feelings into words.

She must have been nearly sixteen when I came upon her this way one day, her eyes full of dreams and shining like stars through a bog-mist.

"What is it, dearie?" said I, for I had the notion there was something she wanted to talk about.

"I was thinking of Himself." The thorn bloom colored deep.

"Oh, I thought Himself had been forgotten long since, been put by along with the short skirts and the playthings."

She shook her head.

"He hasn't been very real for a long time. He's seemed very dim and far away—like the lilac-bush house and the robins and the faeries and all; something that had happened once but had gone away—forever."

She stopped a minute while her fingers brushed the strings and then she went on, a lower note in her voice:

"But, Nora darling, he's coming back — real again. And I've been thinking—I've been thinking that when he comes I'll know him by his music—his playing. I have the feeling that he'll take father's violin and make it play in the same wonderful way that I can remember, when father used to sit beside my crib and play me to sleep when I was a tiny child."

She turned away to hide how great the feeling was with her, and I was mortal glad, for the last words had left me gaping with open mouth like a half-wit. However, curiosity wouldn't let me be; and having given her time enough to feel natural again, I asked:

"And who might have been telling you that—about the father playing you to sleep?"

"Why, Little Hans."

She had come over to the window-seat and was half kneeling on it, her eyes gazing out over the housetops to the river running northward toward the old home.

"It was the other night when I was there for supper and I followed him up to the nursery while he played little Judith to sleep. The figure of Little Hans in the dim light and the music and all seemed to bring something back to me, and when we tiptoed out I asked him if I could not remember my father playing just that way beside my crib. He looked at me for a minute as if he were waking up from a dream, and then he said: 'Of a certainty. It is the fathers who play the cradle-songs—the mothers sing them.'

"And then he added, as we came down-stairs, 'Judith, girl, it was your father who could play the cradle-songs—I, on my 'cello, it is nothing. But he could play sleep straight into the eyes of a child, and sweet dreams into the heart.'"

So—Little Hans had not lied the devil into grinning, as the saying goes; he had just coaxed the memory round to her liking. And what else had any of us been doing all these years? But I was glad, and even then I could not be seeing how harm could come of it.

Signs were coming, thick and fast as rooks, that

we were losing the childeen. For the year that followed this talk of Himself, I saw in a hundred different ways the promise of the woman who was creeping into the *dun*. The time she spent doing her hair—her wishfulness for pretty clothes and the pains she took at wearing them right—the changing of her manners with the three, aye, and her busy ways in the *dun*.

I had to be teaching her everything I knew—cooking and sewing and handy bits of knowledge about a house. She was so shyly proud of all the things she learned—more proud than of her book-learning at school; and I mind well the night she got the whole of the tea for the three and made me sit in her chair while she served us, for all the world like a king's daughter serving honored guests.

I think that was one of the greatest wonders of her, the simple way she showed kindness or thought for rich or poor, great or small, making no difference between them. I am doubting if there was any difference to her.

The day of her graduation was a feast-day for us; and by a strange chance it marked the day of my first coming to her—fourteen years before.

She went with Mr. Mayberry and Mr. Paul. Little Hans and his Lady met them there along with the Cuchulains and a half-dozen more from the building who had watched her grow up. I

need not be telling that I stayed at home in the *dun*—for what was I to be tagging after my dearie, and putting shame on her, maybe. Though I cherished every bit of coaxing Herself made to have me with her, I would hear none of it.

As I watched them go, however, I cannot be denying that I had a bit of the same feeling I had had at her christening, when I sat at the back of the church and watched others fetching her down the aisle; but there was no bitterness in the feeling this time.

Sure, there is sense in all things. And how would it have looked to me, Nora Kelley, to be sitting along with the fashionable parents of the other children, trying to look grander than I was and making believe I was kin instead of serving-maid? There has never been a time in my life that I have felt sheared of good birth and self-respect when I kept my place and did the work fate had meant for me; but the minute I passed myself off for anything different from what I was—faith, I didn't even feel fit to be a Kelley, just.

The three must have known how I felt and had it planned among themselves that, after all, I should have a share in the childeen's great day. There was feasting in the wind, I sensed it the minute they came back to the *dun* at day's end,

their arms full of flowers and a caterer at their heels.

"We're going to have one of the old nursery festspiels. This is to be our graduation, Nora, yours and ours. We are to receive diplomas for nursing and dragoning and general guardianship. Then we'll all have to register fresh for higher training."

Mr. Mayberry ended with a wry face, while he turned to give directions for placing the palms and the flowers.

"Isn't Daddy May an old goose?"

The childeen lay a coaxing cheek to mine. "You would think the three never had the slightest suspicion that I was growing up until to-day—just as if it was something I had tried to keep secret and then had sprung it upon them all of a heap, like disagreeable news."

Mr. Paul came over and drove me away to be putting on the black silk they had given me the last Christmas.

"It is fitting that we should be graduating in black, Nora. Dress our feelings, you know," and he gazed down mournfully at Herself in all her dainty whiteness.

She stood their teasing good-naturedly until Little Hans was for putting crêpe on the childher, and then for an instant I thought the day would be

spoiled. She faced them quickly, the three, hands clasped, chin aquiver and tears coming fast into her eyes.

"Why will you be so—so foolish? You're all trying to make me different from the little Judith that you've brought up and loved and played with —and—and I won't be different—I just won't!"

She drew her breath in with a sharp sob.

"You wouldn't like it much if I couldn't grow up—if there wasn't enough of me—or in me—to grow any bigger—if I stayed always just a stunted child. It isn't fair even to make believe you're sorry."

Mr. Mayberry swept her off her feet and tossed her into the window-seat—a way he had had of doing in the old days.

"You're right, Judith. Remember, chaps, no more teasing."

Then he came over to me and fastened again my lace collar more to his liking, telling me I looked as young and fine as the day I came over from Donegal.

The three had invited the *dun* full—a graduating tea they called it. There was a scattering of young people of the childeen's own age, and all the old friends, and some few new ones. And among the last, aye, and the last one to come, was Olaf Nielsson.

He was a young violinist that we had been hearing a deal about for months past. The three had been bringing him to the *dun* for a dozen Sunday afternoons and something had always hindered. Neither the childeen nor I had wasted much thinking on him, though we were glad enough to be seeing him when he came that evening; and I could see the eyes of Herself begin to dance when they spied the violin-case under his arm. I was thinking his looks disappointed her as they did me; for after the greeting and he had passed on I caught her eye following him in a troubled fashion.

He had the coloring of the men of the north, hair so light it was paler than flax, and pale-blue eyes that seemed bottomless. They might hold anything at all, I was thinking, as I looked into them—hate, love, or just forgetfulness—and for the life of me I couldn't be telling whether they were pleasant eyes or not.

It was the size of his head that I did not like—it was twice as big as it should have been for his underbuilt body. It might have belonged to a giant Lochlander, with its shaggy hair thatching the great skull and the bushy brows below hedging the eyes like crescent copses. But the rest of the face narrowed down to a delicate mouth and a pointed chin; I was as much in doubt about the

mouth and chin as I had been about the eyes. He was an unusual man—you could see that with half a glance—one that would make himself felt wherever he went.

"How do you like yon Northman?" I whispered to Herself when he had passed from earshot.

"I don't know. He's quite different from anybody else—a person you would either like very, very much or never want to see again. Wait until he plays—I'll tell you what I think then."

But then there was no need of telling.

We had had tea which took the hearty form of salads and ices and such like—a really fashionable affair. The childeen sat in the big, carved chair, as of old, and poured the cups; this was her wish and I could see the three were glad of it. She was just as simple and bonny as if she had stayed the child of the old nursery; which made it all the harder for any of us to be realizing that the curls were fastened up and the skirts let down for all time.

After tea we had the three make music—the merry, laughing music of the festspiel. Then the Dutch Lady sang—her voice had grown richer with the years of love and babies; and there was more to it now than ever there would have been if she had followed alone the barren road of fame. Two of the songs she sang were of Cuchulain's

making, and it was good to see the pride in the wife's eyes as they listened side by side in the shadow of the room.

Then I had to be telling an Irish tale, Herself choosing it; and what should it be but the tale of the king's daughter. Maybe it was the ringing of the tale in my ears that made the rest of the evening sound so strangely. After this, Olaf Nielsson played.

He played the music of his mountains, the music of storm-winds, dashing waters, and dancing trolls. From the moment his bow touched the strings I could feel the tense waiting in the childeen next to me; and before ever he was finished her face was the face of one who had dreamed her dream true.

He played twice, three times, a song of the north, and a country dance. Then, while every one was clamoring for more, Herself slipped away from my side on the window-seat and crossed the room to the shelf under the mother's picture. No one marked her going but Paul Godfrey and myself; I think we watched like stone images, all thought or feeling fled from us for the moment.

With the violin clasped tight in her arms, she went straight to the lad; there was no shyness now in her look, only a great radiance as she held the instrument out to him.

"Please—please play this. It was my father's."

He took it, smiling, seeing in her request a compliment, just, to his playing. More than that he did not see, I am sure.

But Paul Godfrey saw more; and his was the face of a stricken man when he came to my side and bent over me.

"She has never let any one else touch it—never had it played all these years. My God! And that boy! Do you know what it means, Nora?"

I did. But I was not saying it—not even to one of the three. For in my heart I hoped it would not be; and, like many a fool before me, I thought by denying a thing to keep it from happening.

I was about to turn Mr. Godfrey away with some light words when I caught the voices of the two again.

"What shall I play, Miss Drene? Something American—a composition of your Mr. Mayberry's?"

The childeen shook her head.

"Play something soft, tender, something to put drowsy children to sleep."

He ran the bow back and forth over the strings for a thinking space; then, with a quick turn of the wrist, he swept into a crooning melody, looking down at the child who sat close to him with her face lifted to his.

He played for her, just. Those of us, listening, knew this; and knew as well that she no longer knew we were there, looking on. She sat so still she might have been a fashioned figure; only her eyes glowed and were alive, her whole child-soul pouring forth from them to him.

Faith, I am wrong. It was no longer a child-soul that showed in those great, gray eyes; for it was then I was knowing that the childeen had stolen away for all time and a woman was creeping into the *dun*. A low groan came from the man beside me. I looked into Mr. Godfrey's face, and read a thing there that I had never even dreamed of.

"God help you, man," I whispered.

He turned from me without a word, a look of helpless bewilderment along with the pain on his face; a moment later I saw him steal unnoticed from the *dun*, not to come back the rest of the evening. I wondered then if the knowledge of his love for the child had not come upon him as suddenly as her womanhood had come to her; both wakened by the coming of this new, strange presence among us.

I looked hard again into the eyes of Olaf Nielsson before he went that night, and again I found them bottomless—no meaning there that I, at least, could be reading. And after I had tucked her into

bed, such a joyous wisp of a new-grown woman, I made a prayer of my own at the end of my beads.

Aye, I prayed that if this was to be it would be given to Herself to fill the soul back of those strange eyes with the love and strength and all-timeness that I knew Herself would be having to find in the man she loved, if she was to be finding happiness at all.

Twice he came after this, of a Sunday afternoon, and played the father's violin. It was a pretty sight to see the two together; and though I might not be liking his looks, I could have found no fault in his manner with her—not in a hundred years. He might have been twenty-three—twenty-four—a half a dozen years older than Herself, which made it possible for him to feel a lad's comradeship for her and, at the same time, be showing that gentle gallantry that a new-grown man, who thinks he has bridged the world, likes to be showing a very young lass who has barely touched her foot to the threshold.

As for Herself—she saw or heeded little else when he was by. It was easy to be telling then that when the full love came she would be loving as her mother loved before her. There would be a difference to it, though, of that I was certain.

It was on the second Sunday that Mr. May-

berry and myself sat watching them from across the *dun*.

"It looks to me, Nora, as if the call had come. How do you like the idea of your childeen being courted, eh?"

I shook my head. "She's over-young for that; and what's more—I would be choosing another kind of a wooer."

"What! Not turning against the profession, are you?"

"Musicians are all right, in their place."

"Meaning the concert stage, I suppose."

"Aye, the public eye, as you say it. But for private life—steady—well, they have too much temperament and too little character. They have but one way of giving themselves—in their music; for the rest it's all 'get what you can,' and it comes mortal hard on the wife and family."

"But look at Little Hans?"

"Sure, the good Lord made him a man first and then finished him off for a musician. There's a deal of difference in the two ways of making. I'm meaning now the ones that were fashioned musicians only, and loosed that way in the world. Charles Drene was one—and yonder's another. If they could be kept, just, as music-makers, and put back in their cases, same as their instruments when the concert is over—there'd be a deal of

trouble spared every one, I'm thinking. For they were never meant to have their heels strapped down to a hearthside and cradle-tending; and God pity the women they coax into sharing it with them."

"But Mrs. Drene was happy—"

"Maybe. But she payed a price for it—a price the childeen would never pay."

"Well—what are you going to do about it? It looks—it looks a serious beginning."

I turned upon him quickly.

"The doing is not in my hands—mind that! Who am I, to be barring her way to love when it comes? I can only be wishing this a spring dream; and that summer will be bringing the real thing with a very different cut of a man."

"A farmer?"

Mr. Mayberry laughed, with a touch of scorn in his tone.

"Aye, a farmer," said I, hotly, "the poorest, simplest man in the world, if he has some bottom to his eyes."

With that he looked at me curiously.

"So you've felt that, too? I wonder, Nora Kelley, if anything gets past you?"

"Plenty, but precious little if it has aught to do with Herself. Where she's concerned the Lord fitted me out with an extra set of senses and feelings, I'm thinking."

"Then perhaps you'll have the goodness to tell me what's happened to Paul. For nearly a month he's been about as human and responsive as a clavier. Nora Kelley, what ails him?"

"How should I know? 'Tis the wrong pig you've got by the ear this time. Maybe 'tis the malaria he has, left from that South American concert trip he took."

For a space of a breath he looked at me sharply; and then we fell to talking of other things. When Olaf Nielsson left that evening he startled the three of us with his last words, "It may be a long time before I repeat this great pleasure."

He made as if he was saying this to all present, but his eyes were on the childeen and her hand was in his.

"I leave for the West this week, and if my manager books as he plans, I shall continue on from San Francisco and make my first tour round the world. Isn't that glorious?"

Something ruffled the smoothness of those pale-blue eyes; and I could have sworn by the Holy Saints that, for the first time, I was catching something behind them. But whether it was just excitement or what Mr. Mayberry was always after calling the "divine ego" I couldn't be telling. This I know—there was no thought for anything but himself there.

"Then—we sha'n't be seeing you again for a long, long time—" The childeen had pulled away her hand and was clasping it tight with the other, while the chin began the faintest quivering.

"Oh, not so long. A year—two years—time passes quickly. Think of all the beautiful, strange things I shall have to tell about when I come back!"

"And I shall be here, waiting to hear them."

The childeen said it so simply that I knew again, as it had happened on that first night, when she had given him her father's violin, he saw in it only the compliment to himself. So he passed out of our life for the while.

But it was a good four years before he came again. Following the tour round the world, there was Australia, two seasons in London, and a long time of playing in the big cities of Europe.

Herself kept watch of his doings in the papers and the musical news dropped here and there by artists who had run across him or had told of him in their letters; she had but the two letters from him, sent that first year away. After that I think he forgot her, or, at best, put her out of his mind along with the other things he had no present need of; but I'm doubting if the childeen thought this.

It never came into her mind to expect aught of him. Wasn't it enough that he should have noticed

her at all—promised to come back—and leave her free in the mean time to dream herself as much in love with him as she cared? Aye, and she dreamed. If I had been fool enough in the beginning to think his going would mend matters I found out soon enough my foolishness. It was not a fortnight after when she came to me, her eyes all glimmering with what was in her mind.

"Nora darling, I've been thinking about Himself, and all the things I ought to be doing to be wise enough and—and good enough, when he comes." She nestled her cheek to mine. "You're such a dear—you always understand things without having to put everything into tiresome words. Now don't you think I ought to go to college? I can't sit around doing nothing with all the things that have to be learned. I want to be useful—and—so wise—some day." She finished with a hug.

"I understand," said I. "We'll be after asking the three about it when they come for their next tea-drinking."

But we didn't talk it over till the childeen had gone to bed and the *dun* was to ourselves.

"Well, why shouldn't Judith have her way?" asked Paul Godfrey. He had cheered up amazingly since the other had gone.

"It's the money," said I.

"Why not draw on the capital?"

Mr. Mayberry had never taken seriously to my notion of keeping the money whole for the child.

I shook my head.

"We've managed it for this length; 'twould be a pity, just, to spend it now, when Herself is so nearly of age. And if ever it should happen—"

"I have also that thought," said Little Hans.

"Thought what? Since you've married and acquired a family you've grown as notional as Nora herself," grumbled Mr. Mayberry.

"Nevertheless, it is true, as Nora says."

"Nora never said a thing," Mr. Paul laughed. "You're talking like a fortune-teller, Little Hans."

"It is nothing but sense. What is to prevent some day that Judith learns about the money, how it comes to her, who has made all this possible? Then it will come true—what is in Nora's mind. She will want to give it all back—every penny. So—Nora?"

I nodded. "It might be making a deal of trouble for us all some day if it was not there to give back, should the fancy take her."

Mr. Paul rose angrily from his chair. "You're talking and thinking nonsense. How is she ever going to know unless one of us tells her? and that's not likely. What little gossip there was at the time has buzzed itself out years ago. Draw out

what's needed and send the child to college if her heart is set on it."

"We'll do no such thing," said I. "Aye, I know you're thinking me as stubborn as a goat going to a fair, and maybe I am. But I said the money was to stay whole and I'm not going against good sense. If the childeen has her wish it must be managed another way."

Little Hans stood by me. In the end it was agreed that Herself could go to a city college and, barring the tuition, it would cost no more than her schooling had in the past. What I was not able to do with the interest and the odd bits I could earn, the three could make up; and that fall Herself set about getting wise and good enough for Olaf Nielsson. Sure, whenever I think of her words the bitter laugh takes me.

It was a rare four years for all of us, I'm not denying. And I like to be remembering that in all that time it was a clear sky and fresh winds for the childeen, with never a hint of clouds lying back of the hills.

Mr. Paul, from the first day, began his courting; and though many's the time my heart ached for him, I couldn't but be seeing the humor of his blindness. He couldn't see the length of his own nose when she was anywhere near. He let himself be tethered by every new whim or passing

fancy of hers, looking the while like an old ram trying to frisk in an April pasture. Not that he was old as years or feelings go, but he doubled her age; and in that gathering of springtime hearts and green young minds he showed plainly enough that he belonged to late summer.

As for Herself, she teased him, harried him, and found him comfortable to depend on for any service at any hour; but he was "Brother Paul" to her always, and would never be anything else, I was thinking.

Aye, and Mr. Mayberry was thinking the same. Often and often I would catch the ghost of a dry smile on his lips while watching the two. Once he laughed out crisply, after they were gone and we had been left alone.

"Poor old chap! It's lucky for me I've ten more years to my credit, or I might be—" He cut himself short. "Why don't you tell him he's a fool, Nora, and send him about his business before he's battered his old heart to pieces?"

"And why don't you, then?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It's a risky game to meddle in."

"I'm thinking the same. What's more, I'd rather see Herself going off with yon kind of a fool than a knave."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning nothing at all, but the brighter and purer the candle the thicker the moths; and there'll be men and lads aplenty after her winsomeness—when all's said and done."

After the first year she spoke rarely of Olaf Nielsson; but her tongue was ever ready to be chatting of Himself and it was easy to be seeing that the two names had come to have the one meaning. The separation and his silence had no sting for her. She was making herself ready for whenever he should come again, and the days of waiting were full of sweetness. I could understand, for hadn't I shown her the way of fancy-building long ago, when she was a wisp of a child with bobbing curls and tumble-down socks and a need for making-believe?

I could have gloried in the strength of her building—the rare way she had of filling each day brimful of life—had I been able to read another man but Olaf Nielsson into the measure of Himself. And yet—and yet—I could not be watching her with aught but gladness. Is there a prettier sight the world over than a lass building herself fair and sweet and holy for the mate her heart promises her some day? Tell me that!

The moths began to flutter in earnest about the third year. They were blown from the four ends of the city, singed their wings and fluttered away

again. At first the childeen laughed over them, amused at their foolishness, grieved over their hurt. Then she began taking them more seriously and at last to fret.

"There must be something wrong about me," she said one day, dropping into my lap with a sorry tilt to her chin. Her last candle-victim had been one of her own professors, a man not over-young, who had taken his singes with middle-aged grimness and a cruel lack of gallantry and humor, I thought.

"I don't seem to be able to keep friends among boys and men the way other girls do; and I can't see why. The minute I like them and enjoy being with them they seem to think it's as good as a signed declaration that I'm in love and praying for them to ask me; or they think, the minute they begin being attentive, that I must see that they're serious. It's so stupid and conceited to think every man who's a bit nice to you is going to ask you to marry him."

"Did the old growler pester you to-day, dearie?"

She smiled mistily:

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to give up his course, and it's the best course in English up there."

She ducked her head suddenly on to my shoulder and wailed outright:

"Nora darling, he thinks I've flirted with him—

led him on just to tickle my raw vanity. Those were his words. I wanted to tell him that I did admire him tremendously—and thought he was old enough to make it perfectly safe to have me do it right out honestly and not be coy the way lots of the girls are. Why, he's 'most as old as Brother Paul—and I was just beginning to feel the same comfy good-fellowship."

As fate would have it, that very moment Mr. Paul opened the door and walked in. He took in the childeen's red eyes in a flash.

"Hoity, toity, what's been broken this time—dolls, or hearts, or what?"

Herself jumped out of my lap, her hard little fists beating the air before her as she ran to him.

"Nothing's broken yet, Brother Paul; but something's being pulled and pounded and twisted terribly out of shape. And it's time to stop."

The hard fists loosened, unclasped, and somehow found their way to Mr. Paul's shoulders, while Herself looked up with the old child face when she would come a-begging.

"You've just got to promise me one thing. You must never, never fall in love with me—never as long as you live. I want to die knowing there was at least one man who stayed my friend and never wanted to be anything else. Promise!"

If she had made him promise to become a

Hottentot, or an ape and live in a tree for the rest of his life, he couldn't have showed more bewilderment, more taken out of himself. Faith, he seemed so helpless and near to giving himself away, that I was looking around for some bit of glass or knickknack that I could smash natural-like, and so give the poor man a chance to gather his wits. But before I could find anything handy he had them gathered alone.

"I don't believe that would be a safe promise." He smiled gently. "But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll promise never to propose until you give me permission. Will that do?"

"You're a dear!" She squeezed his hand and came back to me.

"I guess I know what's the matter with me. Brother Paul and Daddy May and Little Hans have just spoiled me for the rest of the men-folk in the world. Sure, isn't that it, Nora darling?"

But the trouble hadn't been laid. Before bedtime her mind harkened back to it again.

"I wonder if I am queer—different from most girls. I just can't stand having men making love to me. I won't have caresses and kisses until Himself brings them—I don't care who it is. Why, in no time at all I should be feeling like a remnant on a bargain counter—fingered and pulled over until I was all mussed and crumpled and soiled

and not fit to be the wife of any man. Maybe it's all right for others; but it isn't all right for me. I simply have to keep what I am and all I am for Himself."

"And supposing," said I, for I couldn't be letting Herself hoard up too much feeling against a promise that might be failing—"supposing you die an old maid. What then?"

She laughed and slapped my cheek. "You're an old goose, Nora." Then she looked down through my eyes, deep into my heart. "Even so, I'd still have my dreams."

I was glad she could say it and think it; but I couldn't help be wondering how she would face the reality with only the dreams left. Aye, there was a good bit of her father about Judith Drene and I was often remembering his way of facing disheartenment and bad fortune when it came.

She was winding up her last year of college when Olaf Nielsson returned. For a month before the papers were full of him—the fame he had won for himself; the entertainment he had had everywhere he had been; and the concerts he was to play in the coming season.

The childeen danced and sparkled about the *dun* like a strayed sunbeam; in many ways it was hard to believe her four years older than when he had left. She still had the child way of being

glad, aye, and of showing it; only her heart and her mind had become a woman's. For myself, I was honestly afeared he had forgotten her, and if he came to the *dun* at all, it would be more by chance and as a stranger.

Great was the surprise, therefore, when I opened the door the very night of his landing and found him standing on our threshold, his head as large, his body as small, and his eyes as bottomless as they had ever been.

"You see I am here." He smiled pleasantly and as a man who expects always to be finding what he wants. "Will you say to her, please, that I have come to tell her all the strange, beautiful things I promised?"

But there was no need to carry the message. With the first sound of his voice Herself was out of the other room and coming toward him, her face flooded with the light that had been breaking all those years. I stood there unable to stir foot until their hands met; then, for the first time since I had had the whole care of Herself, I gathered up the mending and left the room.

I knew before ever she told me that night what was the most strange and beautiful of the things he had come to tell her; I am doubtful if it wasn't the only thing, just. While I mended socks and turned the wristbands on the shirts of a half-

dozen musicians in the building, my mind took to the harder task to build over again into the likeness of Olaf Nielsson the little lad of our fancy who had shared the robins and the lilac-bush house and the childher in the long-ago days.

"Sure, I ought to be able to do it without much trouble, since Herself has found it so easy," I said, aloud, to myself a score of times. But as often as I said it I found myself adding the words, "And yet—and yet—I'm thinking it can't be he."

VII

AUNT'S TOSSING OF CUPS COMES TRUE AND WE CROSS THE WATER

YOU would never have called it the gayest of betrothals, although the two most concerned were that wrapped up in each other and their happiness that they missed naught out of it.

It took the shape of a glorified tea-drinking. The three came, and Little Hans's Dutch Lady, the Cuchulains, and a few others; and they all of them tried to act as glad as could be. But it lacked heartiness. It was easy seeing how they felt: glad that the childeen had found her happiness, but marveling that it should come that way and uncertain as to the length of it. If every one there would have spoken out his mind, I'm thinking each would have said the same thing, just:

"Sure, what was Love about when he shot those two with the one shaft!"

Every one drank tea and gave their blessing freely; there was no mistaking the warmth of

both. And it seemed to me then that if good wishes could compass a thing there need be no worriment for the future of my dearie.

The next day Paul Godfrey packed his things and left the lodging that the three had shared till Little Hans had married, and since then had been his and Mr. Mayberry's. Mr. Paul was going concert-touring to the ends of the earth, if his management could book him that far. Those were his words as he said good-by to me.

"I might have nerve enough to see it through if it was any other fellow; but there's something—something unfathomable about him, like a bottomless lake or a quicksand. Probably it's my confounded jealousy, and that's all; but I haven't grit enough to hang around and watch those two together every day. My management will know where to find me—wire—cable, if you should ever need me."

"God grant there will be no need," said I.

"Amen!" said he, and was gone.

And I settled down to the task of waiting and watching, aye, and praying a bit on the side for good measure. I have said that Herself was, in many ways, like her father, and impatience was one of them. Let her once set her heart on having a thing and she could be thinking or doing naught else till it had been brought to pass. And by the

same token, there was no peace of mind for those about her till then.

I could but be marveling, therefore, when month followed month and there was no whisper of a wedding, no plans for a future outside of hers and mine in the *dun*, and Olaf Nielsson's fiddling. No longer did I gather up my mending and go into the inner room when the two came in together; for I soon found they were as blind and deaf to my being there as they were to the heathen idol. And if I mattered no more than a bit of furniture, what was the harm of my biding where I was? This is the why I was certain there had been no talk as yet of a wedding; and later how I came to have a clue to the reason of it.

They had come in one afternoon from a concert and were sitting in the window-seat, chatting, as was their custom. The childher no longer cluttered the seat, for he had pitched them on to the floor one day with an odd laugh, saying something about their taking up too much room. After that they had disappeared entirely, and I had a pestering notion that they now covered the bottom of her trunk.

"—a fool not to let well enough alone," I could hear him finishing.

"But I don't see why, dear. Two people can't go on to the end of their days just being engaged.

They wouldn't grow, either of them. They would always be reaching out to lay their hands upon life, and life would be always passing them by. And see how he played this afternoon. He's never played like that before."

I knew then they were talking about a young musician who had married a few days before and whose concert they had just attended. I knew, also, although I couldn't be seeing her face, that the childeen's head was tossed and her chin aquiver.

"Sweetheart mine, that's your poetic imagination. The world is full of fallacies. That's one of them—to believe that a happy marriage enlarges a man's capabilities, magnifies his art. Bah! As a matter of fact, it is almost sure to stunt it. Either he grows commonplace, content with commonplace conditions and happiness, or else he frets under a thousand petty irritations and disappointments and runs away from them in the end."

"Then there is something radically wrong or missing with both of them."

"No, there isn't; it's fate, human nature, temperament—call it anything you like; but don't deny it. Look at the birds. Do they ever sing the same after mating-time? They keep up a half-hearted piping while they nest, perhaps; settling down to an occasional rasping chirp at brooding-time. After that—silence."

He reached out a hand and took a firm hold of her chin.

"There, little child, don't get hurt over the truth; it will only bruise you the harder if you do. I know the world and all it holds better than you; and I've seen this in every stage of its progress, worked out to a nicety in the homes of fellow-artists. There are always four stages to it. First, the anesthetic—you succumb to the drugging effect of satisfied emotions and continue for a period oblivious of everything else; second, the coming to, painful wrenchings into consciousness when you wake up to the fact that something has been amputated or something grafted on; third, the time of liquid nourishment, when everything tastes tame, watery, and unpalatable; and, last of all, convalescence, where you come back to the world turned commonplace, or back to your art, divorced."

"I don't believe a word you say, for all it sounds so—so clever. And you don't believe it, either. You don't—you don't!"

A few minutes after this he was playing to her. No love-sick maiden, falling asleep with her ear to a faery hill, could have harkened to more ravishing music.

I sat in the dusk apart from them, my hands idle. I was forgetting the things he had said and

the things I thought about him, feeling only a great worshiping for the fashion in which he could play love and tenderness, aye, all the best makings of the soul, into the hearts of others. And if I could be stirred by his music, was it any wonder that Herself paid small heed to his words?

"Can life hold anything sweeter, better, than this, sweetheart?" I heard him say before he went.

"How do we know? How do you know that something far sweeter isn't waiting for us—afterward? Isn't it cowardly to be afraid when we love each other so?"

He gave a short, dry laugh.

"Then let's be cowards, say I. It's too much to risk, for the present, anyway."

"But"—I knew the childeen was finding it hard to put it into words—"it doesn't have to end either in commonplaces or in divorce. There was my father and mother; see what their life meant?"

A hush fell over the *dun;* it seemed as if I could be counting all our hearts beating at a different pace. It was Olaf Nielsson who raised the silence:

"Oh yes, your father."

And I thought he laughed again.

The next morning Herself pulled me down suddenly into a chair while I was sweeping. She followed promptly after into my lap.

"Nora darling, I've just got to begin and do

something. I can't keep hanging around doing nothing, waiting to—for something to happen to me."

I never blinked an eye, or let on by word or sign, that I knew what was back of her wish.

"So, I've been thinking we might go into partnership, you and I, and write down some of your Irish tales. Who knows? we might become famous."

She ended with a wisp of a smile that held anything but gladness. What did she care for fame!

"'Tis a grand idea," said I. "I've always had a caoining hunger to be famous myself; maybe get into the papers some day. Do you think we could manage it?"

She rubbed her cheek against mine.

"You blessed old goose! Never mind about the fame, but we'll have great times doing the stories. We'll keep it a secret, yours and mine; and think of the fun spending the money!"

"Aye, if there is any."

But we set to with a fair will at the story-making. For wasn't I knowing that the childeen needed it as a covering for a new-found ache, an ache she would never be owning to even in her own heart?

We had a regular way of working. First, I would be telling the story over again to her; then

she would be telling it back to me; and afterward she would go off by herself and write it down. Sometimes she would change it a bit or add to it, as the fancy took her; but she never lost the flavor, and many a time I would laugh over the Irish words she would use and the twist she would give to a sentence.

She made a list of all the magazines, mounted it on a bit of cardboard, and pegged matches in holes opposite for the tales and where they had gone. And when a tale had gone down the length of the board and reached the bottom, the manuscript went into a drawer for a rest and trimming over.

It was a grand game, for all its disappointments, for no tale was ever halted half-way on the list. Each in turn found its way into the drawer at last, and all the return we ever had for our postage was a printed slip of thanks. But it eased her mind over the restless, haunting times that were sure to come pestering every now and again.

A year came and went, bringing no change, barring the added fame of Olaf Nielsson and a fading of the thorn bloom on the childeen's cheeks. At first I could not be sure of this last. I would rub my eyes hard, thinking old age was already dimming them, and would look again, but one

day Mr. Mayberry spoke of it and I knew then it was true.

"Confound his impudent conceit!" he growled. "Thinks he's so sure of her, so necessary to her happiness, that he can just buzz about, sipping all the inspiration he needs for his music and the companionship and adoration he needs for himself; giving nothing—absolutely nothing, and thinks she'll never ask for anything else. Phaugh! The man's a sucker, a parasite. Nora Kelley, you used to be a fair hand at marriage-making. What's happened to you?"

"I don't know," said I. "Maybe it's better so."

"Better to let him suck her dry of all her sweetness and freshness, and then throw her away for a husk, while he goes sailing on to the next blossoming soul? I tell you it's unbearable. For all his years, I wish to God Paul might have had her!" And he took to pacing the floor like a menagerie beast.

"But would marriage mend it any, do you think?"

"I don't know. Probably not. It's Scylla and Charybdis for her, poor child. I could almost wish him bad, a rascal, a villain, an out-and-out rotter, than the thing he is. I don't believe there is a meaner, more contemptible species under God's good sun than a human parasite, the kind

that nourishes itself on the hearts and souls of others."

And with that he strode out of the *dun*.

Mr. Mayberry's word bided with me. The second year dallied along and Olaf Nielsson was well nourished, aye, mortal well. The childeen and I played at our tale-making, and at each fooling the other. Sure, we grew master hands at making believe that Life was doing her best and cracking her merriest jokes for us.

There were days, though, when it seemed I could stand it no longer, when I must hound him from the door with plain speaking at last. But my lips stayed dumb, while I kept choking the anger that was in my heart with the ashes of burned-out promises.

Another spring was coming. Even the city streets were stirred with a far-away breath of it. From the windows of the *dun* we could see the banks across the river greening fast; and the flower-sellers on the corners were peddling bunches of pussy-willow.

There was new life, new hope, in the air; and I could see Herself was gathering new heart. It was the childeen of the betrothal days that danced into the *dun* one afternoon, her eyes sparkling for the first time in months.

"Oh, Nora, I've got the gladsomest news!

Daddy May told me yesterday that the old house was empty, waiting repairs and a new tenant; and Olaf is going to take me up there for the whole day. We'll take our lunch and eat it under the lilac bush, of course; the lilacs will be hardly budded, but perhaps the robins will be there. And maybe there will be a few left-over faeries and a faint tracing of the wishing-ring. Just think of it, Nora darling, a whole day in the country!"

I hugged her to me for very gladness, while she rubbed her cheek to mine and went on, dreamily:

"I think—yes, I guess that's what has been the matter with me lately. I've missed being out of doors. Life has seemed so crammed with city and excitement, so many entertainments and so little real living. I've grown hungry for green fields and shady trees and Sabbath quiet—and simple things."

Her dreaminess changed of a sudden to plain speaking.

"And now I'm going after those stories. There's one magazine I've overlooked. I'm going to pick out the best three and send them direct to the editor with a letter that will melt his heart and tickle his fancy at the same time. If we could just land one story, Nora, I know it would change our luck."

I sent a silent, wishful blessing after the two

next morning. It was a rare spring day and I couldn't help feeling there was fate in it. I could picture the two taking the train up the river, the look of the station, the climb up the hill, the coming into the garden and the setting down to a day of housekeeping under the lilac bush. For wasn't I knowing that Herself could not be going back and not sharing her memories with him?

And more than that, wasn't I knowing that if there was that much of a real man in Olaf Nielsson to fit under a hat, as we say in Ireland, he couldn't be listening to those memories without wishing to step into them and to bring her dream true. So my heart sang as I took up the mending that day; and the day spun itself out with pleasant thinkings.

I had had my tea and the things put away when the two returned. Even in the dusk I could make out the droop of her whole body; and I wasn't liking the way she slipped down in the first chair by the door. Olaf Nielsson did not sit down, and she did not ask him. He stood a moment fidgeting with his hat, uneasy on his feet.

"You're all tired out. A whole day in the country like this always tires one. I think I'll not stay now; you're better off resting. I'll look in early to-morrow and see how you are."

There was no answer, and with a "Good night"

he turned to the door. He had his hand on the knob and the door half opened when she stopped him.

"I don't believe you'd better come to-morrow, or the next day. I'll write—when I want to see you."

The door was banged shut and Olaf Nielsson came back to her chair.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing very much. I just want to be alone a few days and think."

He threw back his great head and started combing his hair straight up with his fingers, a way he had when things were not to his liking.

"I know what's the matter. You're hurt because I laughed over those childish fancies of yours. I wouldn't have, I promise you, if I had known you took them so seriously. I thought it was only a charming, poetic fancy of childhood, something you had outgrown long ago; and I couldn't honestly fall in with the part of your dream boy, grown up. It wouldn't have been fair to let you think I was that kind.

"Bah!" he went on. "I hate the country for more than a few hours at a time. Those long stretches of stillness get on my nerves; and country sounds grow hellishly monotonous. I hate the buzz of insects, the creak of gates, barnyard chatter, and

the strident voices of country yokels, the drop of rain from eaves, the interminable rustle of wind in everything; I can't stand it for long. And country life bores me into a state of criminal violence. You see, I must be honest."

"I see," echoed the childeen, softly. "Now please go."

"Didn't the day go right, dearie?"

I could not keep the words off my lips that night.

She was still sitting in the chair where he had left her, and, the lights not being lighted, I could not see her face. But for all the dark I could have told what was in it.

Her voice lagged pitifully when she answered: "Oh, the day was all right. Only it's a foolish pastime to go hunting after memories. They're as elusive and as disappointing as the rainbow's end. Memories—fancies—dreams—the only way to keep them real and unspoiled is to hide them away where you can't even find them yourself."

It was the third day after, when I was coming in from some shopping, that I found the two together again in the *dun*. They were deep in their talk in the window-seat; and knowing I could not pass into the inner room without disturbing them, I slipped off my coat and sat down, unheeded, to my mending.

I tried hard dulling my ears with thinking of a

thousand things; but, bit by bit, their talk sifted through to my brain. Before I knew it, God forgive me, I was listening with ears wide open to all they were saying.

"No, it isn't yesterday, or the country, or any one particular thing. It is the accumulation of all that has happened since our life together began. So much that means happiness to you, I can't understand, and you're afraid to try my way of happiness."

Her voice dropped away into a whisper and I could hardly be hearing the last word.

"I don't seem to be able to make you understand, you're such a child, that present-day love does not always end, as the folk-tales would have it, with marrying and living happily ever after. Life and love are two complex things, in spite of the fact that you think them so simple. They're not plums on a tree, ripe and ready to be shaken into the lap of any passer-by; or, if they are, they don't taste as sweet as they look before they're plucked."

"Oh, Olaf, you have such a discouraging way, when you don't want to do a thing, of piling heaps of words up in front of it and hedging it all about with clever sayings, until it's hard for me sometimes to look over the top and see what is behind it all. Why won't you say, honestly: 'Judith, I

don't want to marry; I don't want the trouble and responsibility of it; I don't want anything vital to come between me and my art.'"

"Come, come! Aren't you wading into deep waters, sweetheart, and making unhappiness for us both? Isn't it enough to say, for the present, that life is good, that love and youth are ours? What more can we ask? We don't want to marry yet. Why fuss about it?"

"But—I do." The childeen's chin was quivering hard and there were two bright spots on her cheeks. "I want to be married. I want a home and—and—all the things that belong there."

Olaf Nielsson rose quickly and stood squarely in front of her.

"We're too far in now to dodge this any longer; and we had better understand just what each of us wants and what each of us means, once and for all time. By 'things' do you mean children?"

"Yes, they are part of it."

"Well, I don't intend to have any children. I'm sorry to say this out so baldly, Judith, knowing what a horribly maternal little person you are. I think that's probably what makes the big difference between us; two-thirds of your womanhood is motherhood, while I haven't the fractional part of fatherhood in my being. I hate children; I mean, until they've outgrown their drooling, teeth-

ing, helplessness and have acquired some degree of intelligence. Anything young and undeveloped disgusts me, I don't care whether it's featherless birds, or kittens with their eyes shut, or babies.

"More than that, I don't want the responsibility and dependence of them. It would take you from me, making the first great wedge in our lives, a wedge that time would be hammering in farther and farther, until you were wrapped up in them and their needs, and I should be hunting up some other woman for inspiration. Why are you shivering? That's like a woman—begs you to be honest with her and then cringes under it."

"I'm not cringing. I think I have known how you felt for a long time, and I've been a coward, too. I've been afraid to have you put it into words."

"Isn't my love enough? Does life have to hold babies to make it worth while?"

A hint of mockery was creeping into his voice; and when she made no answer, he went on, the mockery growing. "I can't understand how so many beautiful women are ready, anxious to plunge into maternity—eternity of cumbersome figures, double chins, graceless carriages, and lusterless expressions. They throw away their beauty and charm as if they were valueless and expect their husbands to go on adoring them and think-

ing them the same ravishing creatures that they first fell in love with. Oh, I tell you truly, love is no more steadfast than the rocks and the hills, and they crumble with weathering. And why shouldn't a woman be as proud to nurse her beauty, mother her own womanhood and her powers of inspiration for the man she loves, as to bear him children?"

"Please don't say any more. I understand so well how you feel—what you think—it's foolish wasting words. Only I want to say this before you go: Love, companionship, inspiration, even beauty, are quite possible with babies, if the love is great enough. Look at my mother. Think what their life together was!"

She was on her feet, facing him, her hand pointing to the picture and the violin.

"It's getting a little tiresome having you compare me with your father. Why do you do it?"

"Because he was the most wonderful man I know—a great artist, a faithful, adoring husband, a true friend, and a loving father. Isn't it perfectly natural I should measure the man I love by his greatness?"

There was great contempt and anger in the flinging out of Olaf Nielsson's arms.

"Bah! He died when you were too young to remember him or know what he was. Ask any one

of the profession who knew him how high he measured as a man, and I'll not be afraid to measure against it. Why, his very death was a slander against his manhood!"

"What do you mean?"

I sat there in my corner, hearing the question asked and knowing what the answer would bring with it. I had but the one thought—to cry the man silent or take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him out of the *dun*. Yet I sat as dumb and immovable as the heathen idol; good for naught, an Irishwoman with her tongue and her fists leashed. I could have cursed myself through the four provinces of Ireland for letting the thing happen; yet it happened and I was powerless to stay it.

"What do you mean?" Herself repeated the question.

"Can it be possible that you don't know how your father died?" His voice sounded as if he did not believe her.

"No. Tell me!"

He flung himself back on the window-seat and took to combing his hair again. The childeen still stood, turned so that she could be catching every look, every gesture he made.

"If it's really true you don't know, which seems impossible, I hate to be the one to tell you. Yet

you're sure to hear of it some time, somewhere; and perhaps not told too sympathetically."

I thought, as I listened to him, that never yet had I heard a thoughtless body let the cat out of the bag that he did not try to explain away his carelessness; first, by saying there were others with their fingers on the draw-string who would be letting the cat jump if he did not. 'Tis always the way with those who loose their tongues to unpleasant or hurtful gossip.

"Well, why don't you tell me?"

The childeen's voice rang with impatience.

"Your father—" he stopped, coughed, cleared his throat, and, this plainly freeing his tongue, he plunged through the miserable tale: "Your father shot himself the day he had run through his own fortune, your mother's money, and everything belonging to his best friend. He had lost his art, his profession, the thing he probably loved best in the world, through an accident to his arm, and it unbalanced him.

"You can't blame him; no one blamed him. It just shows that we who are born to walk the heights cannot be judged or measured by the standard of the valley-grubbers. It takes so little for us to lose a foothold, to become dizzy, afraid of losing what we have climbed for, more afraid to climb again. That is why I am willing to make

any sacrifice for my art. I know how impossible it would be for me to exist without it."

Herself had made no sound, no sign that what he had said meant aught to her; he might have been speaking of an unknown person, for all she seemed to care.

"I'm more than glad to see you can take it so quietly and sensibly; I never know just what to expect of you, Judith."

He settled back, a more comfortable expression on his face.

"So you see, sweetheart, it's never fair to measure one man against another. I can safely boast of loving you as much as your father loved your mother; for my part, I believe I love you much more. You see, when the test came, love was not enough to keep him back, to face life over again for her."

"And my mother?"

"She died a few days later, of heart complications, I believe."

"And—" Herself had another question on the end of her tongue, but she changed it. "Do you know who that best friend was?"

"It was one of the three guardians, I can't remember which one, but I think Mr. Mayberry."

She looked helplessly about her and saw me for the first time. Quickly she started toward me;

then stopped of a sudden, as if again her mind was changed.

"Will you please go down for Daddy May? I want him now, this minute!"

I stumbled, still speechless, out of the *dun;* and a few minutes after the two of us returned together. I had fetched him without an explanation; and the poor man stood dumfounded, looking from one to the other. The childeen turned to Olaf Nielsson:

"Please say it all over again—what you have just told me about—them." And when he had finished she turned to Mr. Mayberry. "Is it—all true?"

For the space of a breath I thought he would be springing at the other man's throat. Instead he swung an arm about the childeen's shoulders and looked the murder that was in his heart.

"You cur," he muttered, "you sneaking, low-bred cur!"

A wisp of a sigh broke from the childeen.

"Then—then it *is* true. Were you the friend, Daddy May?"

"No, dear, it was Paul. But Paul urged it on him, made him take it. They both thought they were going to make millions out of the speculation. It was a perfectly fair, open-handed deal."

"I think I understand. Wasn't there anything left for Paul—afterward?"

It was then I tried to get Mr. Mayberry's eye, and failing, pulled him hard by the sleeve; but the answer was out of him before he heeded me:

"Yes. Your father made the only restitution in his power. He willed him everything there was left of his personal property."

"But—but I don't understand how. If father lost and gave away everything, what has taken care of me all these years?"

In bewilderment she looked from Mr. Mayberry to me; and then he caught the meaning of my hand on his arm. I knew he was cursing himself inside for a fool, and, thank God, I found my tongue at last.

"If the grand gentleman yonder," and I nodded my head in the direction of Olaf Nielsson, "will have the great kindness to take himself off where I've no doubt he'll be finding himself more welcome, we'll do what we can to raise the trouble he's been hurling down like boulders from those heights he's given to tramping."

And Herself stretched out a wee, shaking hand and added, "Yes, please—please go!"

There was a lot he had to be saying before we were finally rid of him; but at last I had the door closed and barred behind him and I could return to my dearie with the breath coming easier. She

was on the window-seat, holding Mr. Mayberry off at arm's-length.

"No, Daddy May, not now. I don't want comforting now; I want you and Nora to tell me the truth—everything!"

So, little by little, she had the whole tale out of us. We skimmed over the hurting things, fooling ourselves that she was none the wiser; and we made much of what there was pleasant to tell. I was glad we could be saying honestly that not one penny of the original money had been touched, for that was the first thought in her mind—to be giving it all back to Mr. Paul. It was the one grain of comfort she seemed to be getting from the whole miserable affair.

Silence held us for a long while after we had finished and she had asked all the questions that were in her mind. What was in Mr. Mayberry's mind I had no way of guessing; he sat, grim-eyed, his eyes on the child. But she was looking out of the window over the housetops to the river beyond, and I knew well she was piecing together all we had told her, building up a new memory to take the place of the old. As for myself, I sat gripping my heart, waiting for what she would have to say when the memory was built.

It came at last, bit by bit, and, oh, the bitterness of it! Hardness had crept into her voice,

and the lines of her mouth were straight and unyielding.

"I'm afraid I've been very slow about understanding; but at last I think I have worked it out quite plainly. It's funny how we cling to unsubstantial things like memories, even after we've found out there's no truth in them. The person was very clever who thought to picture Truth with a torch and a sword. What she can't cut away she burns up; it's—it's so simple to eliminate empty fancies and wrong standards this way and leave a cleared ground for building afresh. Only, when there's nothing left to build with, what are you going to do?"

Mr. Mayberry leaned forward and took her firmly by the two hands.

"There's a great deal left. At first, perhaps, you will think it rather worthless building material. But it's there. As far as I can see, the only thing you are likely to really lose is Olaf Nielsson; and, by Heavens! I can't call that a loss."

A jagged little smile broke the straightness of her mouth.

"You're thinking only of the man, Daddy May, not of what he stood for. For years and years I've been slowly building into him all the wonderful things in life. He stood for everything good and beautiful; he was my bringer of dreams, my ful-

filment of fancy. Losing him, I lose not only this, but the power, the wish, ever to dream again."

She wrenched her hands free of his. "Don't you see, can't you see I've never possessed anything real in my whole life? It has all been but a bundle of fancies, a faery wishing-ring, a dream companion; and afterward the memory of a father and mother who never existed.

"Oh, it didn't have to be put into words for me to understand. It wasn't necessary to say, 'Judith, you never counted in your parents' scheme of life. They lived and loved and died with little thought of you.' Do you suppose, for a minute, if my father had been the man I have worshiped in that violin there, he could have ended his life as he did; or if my mother had had one spark of motherhood she would have gone away after him, with never a care for the child left behind? Women who love their children don't die that way of broken hearts; they live on for them, work for them, starve for them. I tell you, I've had nothing—nothing in my whole life but lying memories and empty promises."

She threw herself face down on the cushions, shaking with sobs, but making never a sound. What could we be saying to her then, either of us? So I pulled Mr. Mayberry after me into the hall.

"Best let her be till she's cried out some of the

hurt. There'll be enough for us all to be doing afterward. God help her!"

"Hadn't we better send for Paul? He might—"

"Aye, he might," said I, "and make matters worse than they are now. Faith, would you have her marrying him now out of gratitude, or just for the want of something better to take her mind off her trouble? Let time turn her to him, if it is to be, not a pair of old meddling fools like us."

The childeen hardly spoke again that day. She wrote to Olaf Nielsson, telling him never to come back; and when she posted the letter she walked for hours along the parkway, coming back so tired she could hardly drag one foot after the other.

The next day and the next passed much the same. There was little said, and that bitter enough; nothing eaten, and the long walks. I think neither of us heeded the time or what was happening about us. And then as dusk fell one evening she came over to me in my corner with the mending, bringing back the past with one great sweep of the years. Again she was a wee child, and coming down the stairs the Sunday afternoon of the christening, only to trip and fall senseless at the bottom.

"Nora, I want Nora's lap."

It was the same cry coming back to me out of a

dim, stirring consciousness. And as I had gathered her into my arms then, so I gathered her now, she nestling her head on my shoulder while I crooned to her. So we rocked and crooned till there was no light left, and darkness made it possible for me to say easily what had been in my mind for a day past.

"Dearie," said I, "do you know I've been thinking the time's ripe for the going back to Ireland, as we used to be planning in the long ago."

"But there's no money to take us. Every penny in the bank has gone to Brother Paul; I couldn't sleep till that was off my mind. We'll have to earn the trip now before we can take it."

"But would you like to be going, dearie?"

"I don't know; perhaps I would. I think I'd like to be going anywhere away from the places that keep reminding me."

"Then we'll go," said I. And I told her of the bit I had put by in the bank. "'Tis not over-big; but, sure, in Ireland you can be living like a king's daughter for a pound a week; and there's enough to keep us a good many weeks. Until—"

She put her fingers over my lips so I couldn't be finishing, then she whispered:

"I couldn't take it from any one else—not even Daddy May or Little Hans. But my debt to you, Nora, is so big that that much more doesn't seem

to matter. That would be easy to pay compared to all the rest. If I could only find a way of helping."

And then something flashed into my mind—a letter that had stood beside the heathen idol all day, unheeded. I dumped Herself out of my lap, turned on the lights, and fetched the letter.

"I think," said I, handing it to her, "that it holds a first-class way of helping." For it was a small letter this time, and it bore the printed mark of the magazine where she had sent the stories a week before.

She opened it without interest; but the reading inside brought a wisp of a smile to her lips.

"It's funny how things happen when you don't care any longer. They've taken the three stories, at fifty dollars apiece. Just think how happy we'd be if this had come a little while ago."

"Faith, I'm thinking how happy it's making us now. Isn't it helping us across the water, where we'll be finding more stories to write? And isn't it promising a deal more that may come true this time?"

I finished the last under my breath, for it was only another fancy; and I was knowing full well the childeen had grown sick of fancies.

And so it came to pass—the tossing of Aunt's cups on that day long gone by when I had told her of my wish to go into service. And on a rare

day in May the childeen and I stood on the end of the steamer, with a host of St. Columkill's own birds whirling and screeching after us, our faces toward Ireland and the gold penny in my pocket.

She said never a word, but I think she was glad to be going; and all the time I was thinking:

"Sure, Nora, there are some troubles hard to cure. But over yonder you'll be finding the primroses new-budded and the throstles and linnets mating, just; and Doctor Danny awaiting you. And, sure, Doctor Danny alone is a mortal good hand at curing trouble."

VIII

HERSELF LAYS FOOT TO THE HUNGRY GRASS

IT matters a good bit what sort of a day you first come into Ireland; whether you land at Queenstown or Mobile.

If you are after finding the sea-fog thick on the land, killing the green of the fields and the blue of the sky, and turning everything to a leaden color, sure it turns your spirits as well; and you long for another country and wonder how you came to set foot on such a God-forsaken bit of sod. But if the day shines fair, 'tis the grand welcome you feel, be you stranger or home-comer.

We came the northern way; and never were bluer sky or greener shores to welcome a body back. Faith, I could have shouted with the thankfulness that Herself should be seeing it all for the first time every bit as fair as the pictures I had been making for twenty years; and sure there was a great consolation to myself to come back and find that time and memory had not overcolored it.

The change in the childeen had grown more marked each day of the crossing. The hard lines had settled about her mouth, and the bitterness of tongue was growing sharper. It is sad at heart I should have been if I hadn't been thinking with each waking that it would pass with the coming into Ireland, and, sure, the first day it looked true enough.

The childeen said little as we tugged it up from Mobile to Derry; and afterward in the train, with our faces toward Donegal, 'twas myself who had to do the talking for the two. And I said little.

There are times when eyes do better than ears, when you can be getting closer to a new country and new people with just looking and feeling. So I leaned back in my corner of the compartment, and, for the most part, left her alone to be seeing the glimpses of hamlet and country, hill and meadow, from the car window. But the best of it all was coming through the Gap. She sat up eager then, her hands tight-clasped, and taking little quick gasps.

"That's whin, isn't it, Nora? It's as yellow as gold, and great masses of it! And those sheaves of little purplish flowers—I know, don't tell me! Those are faery thimbles. Oh, I'm glad we came! It's so sweet and peaceful; just the place for the sick-at-heart to come."

"Faith, it's a better place for the glad-at-heart; you'll be finding it so."

I spoke bluntly, for I had my mind made before ever we set foot on the steamer there was one thing I would not be doing. I would not be indulging the notion that because Olaf Nielsson had been a mortal failure as her "bringer of dreams" there was naught left for her but to die of a broken heart. Or, what is worse, linger on with a bitter one. Faith, there is no surer way to keep a body sick than falling in too hearty with her sickness. This much I could do; for the rest—there was Ireland and Doctor Danny.

I had sent a letter before me to Doctor Danny, telling him we were coming, and enough about Herself for him to understand. I had asked him to find us a stopping-place, somewhere not too near my old home, so pestering memories could come back to roost; yet near enough so I could be getting over often to see the old mother. She, I knew, had been counting the days through the twenty years till I should come home, for all that she had another daughter and a son to bide with her through her old age.

At Donegal we changed cars; and as the guard was locking us in I saw a man's figure come hurrying down the platform. For a second it was in mind that here was Doctor Danny's father,

looking for us, till I minded that the old doctor had been dead since before I left home. With that I minded that twenty years changes more than the calendar.

It was Doctor Danny himself, grown heavy and grizzled; but the moment his head was abreast of our window I knew the eyes and the smile that sprang at the corners of his mouth.

"Is it Nora Kelley?" said he, stretching a hand through to me.

"It is the same," said I, gripping the hand.

"*Cæd mille failte*—and it's time ye came."

Then, as the train started, he ran a bit with the carriage, calling directions:

"I've taken the bungalow on the knoll for ye. Padraic MacBride is away for a year's traveling and is glad to be letting it. Michael Baron has the keys; he'll be waiting ye at the station. Tell him I was saying he was to see ye comfortable; and I'll be over before long. *Slan leat.*"

The train had carried us out of earshot; but the ring of his voice was still with me and it had lost none of its heartiness or good courage in the years that were gone. I knew him for the same brave, fine man that had sent me about filling my empty heart when I feared it had broken entirely; and wasn't I knowing that I had done the wise thing in bringing my dearie to him?

"And so that's Doctor Danny," I heard Herself saying in a pleased, surprised way.

"Aye, 'tis Doctor Danny. And I'd rather be having a welcome from him than from the Lord Mayor of Dublin or the whole Irish House of Parliament."

She smiled and patted my hand. "I believe you brought me up half Irish; if you keep on, Nora darling, you'll be finishing me all Irish."

"Sure, worse things might happen you, dearie. But I'm still thinking you're thorough American with an Irish trimming, just, of thorn bloom, and shamrock for luck."

The bit of a train drew up at the Killymard station. There was a fair-sized scattering of people around; and in the time it took to be getting out, along with our luggage, and looking around, face after face came back to me, as if from a dream.

There was Michael Baron, the agent, and the two Tomaises, just finishing a disagreement, natural as life; and Paddy, the half-wit, with his flock of geese at his heels—I was going to say the same geese, but it must have been their tenth great-grandchildher. Aye, and many more.

They were all about us as we stepped foot to the platform; and such a shaking of hands and a welcoming I never did expect. Sure, 'tis the Irish

that have the trick of turning the tongue the right way; and the words of blarney sounded mortal good to my ears, for all there was enough of the new country about me to salt them well.

"'Tis handsome ye've grown in twenty years," was Michael's greeting.

"Faith, the grass has turned greener since ye set foot on the sod," shouted Tomais, the bailiff; while Tomais, the cobbler, growled out in the voice I minded so well, "Maybe ye were thinkin' it stopped growin' entirely with ye gone."

But it was Paddy, the half-wit's, greeting I was liking best. He pulled me by the sleeve, while the other hand twisted his beaten thatch of hair, and he whispered, "Whist, Nora, alanna! The faeries were asking after ye."

I found my brother John at the back of the station, driving the old jaunting-car from the farm. He stacked our luggage at the top, while we climbed in furninst; and Herself had her first ride through an Irish village up an Irish hill in the good old Irish style.

When I laid eyes on the home that was to be ours, sure, I was for blessing Doctor Danny all over again. It stood on a humpy knoll at the end of the road leading out to Killymard; and I minded that before Padraic MacBride, a village boy who had turned into a poet, had built his bungalow on

the top, it had been a faery hill, one of the gentlest in all the country.

So here we were, coming into Ireland on as grand a spring day as a body could wish, with the whin and the faery thimbles abloom, with Doctor Danny and the countryside giving us the welcome, and a house waiting for us at the top of a faery hill. Was it small wonder, then, that I felt the luck was with us, and that it wouldn't be long before we were laying Olaf Nielsson, along with all the other troubles, deep under that blessed green sod?

The bungalow stood alone on that humpy knoll. There were but four rooms in it, and from the terrace in front we could be looking down on the people coming and going in the village street, or off to the hills and the sea that circled us.

I drew the childeen out when we were alone and pointed out the seven counties we could be seeing from where we stood; aye, every treasured bit of moorland, copse, or shore I showed her. Only the speck of land cresting the sea did I pass over; for even then I could not be telling her of the graves at Killymard.

Doctor Danny came that evening, as he had promised. We sat alone for a bit, the childeen lingering outside; and 'twas strange what a short time and how few words it took us to

be bridging those twenty years and more I had been gone.

In the end we spoke of our hopes. I was full of the childeen's trouble, and wishful to be raising it; he was full of the new hospital, the first in the countryside, with the open end of it for the white plague that he had been fighting so long, and the lad he had raised to follow him in his work.

"The two of us have found the same cure for empty lives; and if I helped ye to find yours, sure, wasn't it ye who put me on the road to mine!" He laughed till the whole of him shook. "When that first letter came from ye, telling of the wee lass out yonder, it set me a-thinking. And the very next lad that was wanting parents I took. They were gentlefolk from Belfast, summering here; and as fate would have it, the both of the parents were lost in a sudden storm on the bay yonder. There happened to be no relatives over-keen to be raising the lad, so it was all as easy and as pleasant as a Limerick reel at a county fair. I took out the papers within a month; and to-day he is a better doctor than myself."

"I'll box his ears if I ever hear him say it," said I. "And what might his name be?"

He laughed again. "John Fox—ye can think of the martyrs. But 'tis a good name for a good lad. Wait till ye are seeing him."

He leaned toward me of a sudden and dropped his voice. "And the wee one out yonder? From all I've heard 'tis another planting of Hungry Grass."

"Hungry Grass?" said I, not catching his meaning for the moment.

"Aye, Hungry Grass. Don't tell me, Nora, you're forgetting the way of the Wee Folk to be planting the Hungry Grass wherever a stingy mortal passes, too close-fisted to be scattering crumbs from his bread; and the one to come after him feels the hunger?"

"Aye, I mind it well. But how does it touch on Herself?"

"Faith, what were her parents planting but the seeds of the Hungry Grass for her! They were close-fisted with their love and made no scattering of it, and the child coming after feels the heart hunger. Stomach or heart hunger, it works the same; and ye can mark my word, 'tis that as much as the doings of the fiddler that is ailing her now. Wait—wait a bit for her feet to cross the Hungry Grass, and afterward—"

"Afterward"—I was catching eagerly at his words—"sure, 'tis yourself will be knowing the cure for what's left of the ailment."

Doctor Danny laughed again; the walls fairly shook with it.

"Wasn't I telling ye, just, that my lad was a better doctor than I? Since coming the notion has taken me to leave the curing to him. And why not?" as he saw the look of doubt in my face. "Why not send a lad to cure a trouble of a lad's making? We are getting old, you and I, and a bit old-fashioned; I'm thinking maybe it's better to leave it to younger hands."

"Well, I'm hoping your lad has a thick hide," said I, grimly. "The childeen's tongue has grown mortal sharp of late where a lad's concerned, and she'll either be having naught to do with him or lashing him well."

"Good!"

The doctor pounded his knee while his laugh boomed again through the house.

"The lad has a tongue, too, when he has need of one. We'll let the youngsters lash it out between them; and the only thing in the end that will be showing any considerable harm done is the fiddler's ghost, I'm thinking." He pulled himself out of his chair and went over to the open door.

"Lassie, lassie!" he called into the darkness. "Come in, lassie. Doctor Danny wants a good look at ye before he goes."

In a moment her feet were on the threshold, and Doctor Danny's hands reached out and drew her inside, holding her fast as he looked her over.

"So—this is Nora's wee lass, come all the way to Ireland to find the faeries again." He smiled. There's not another smile like his in the old country, or this, for that matter. "Now I might have had one caught for ye, just, and put up in alcohol, if I'd had the time."

A wisp of a smile answered his.

"A faery in alcohol! Oh, Doctor Danny, that's dreadful! It's like advertising to can memories or pickle one's childhood. No, no; if I'm to find the faeries again, and believe in them, they'll have to come out of their raths for me to see them and feel them with eyes and fingers."

"Well, we might be managing that, too." Doctor Danny winked over his shoulder at me. "Midsummer Eve is not so far off. Wait till then, *cailin mo chroidhe*, and we'll see what we'll see."

With that Doctor Danny was gone; and what happened next took the breath out of me. In a flash Herself was before me, her fists tight and her eyes glinting hard, aye, hard as knife-blades.

"Nora, you've got to stop this foolishness, and stop Doctor Danny, too. I'm heart-sick of it all—playing at what isn't true—filling up one's life with make-believe and nonsense. You treat me as if I was still a child, with a broken doll for a grievance—as if I needed to be coaxed back to good behavior and dry eyes with promises of

faeries, or another doll! I tell you, honestly, once and for all, I'll have only real things in my life now, and I'm thinking the only real things are work and—pain." She turned on her heel and went out again into the darkness.

So there I sat, as dumfounded a soul as you could find this side of the world's end. And this was all the good our coming to Ireland had done!

Then Doctor Danny's words came back to me:

"Wait a bit for her feet to cross the Hungry Grass"; and I knew there was naught I could be doing till then, and she had trodden out her bitterness like grapes for wine. But would she?

The next day, early, I heard the wail of a motor horn at the foot of the knoll, and the next minute Doctor Danny's lad came striding up the slope. I was down on my knees on the terrace, hunting a four-leaved shamrock to be putting, unbeknownst, in the heel of the childeen's slipper, and he reached me a strong brown hand to pull me to my feet.

"Miss Kelley," said he.

"Doctor John Fox," said I. "And mind, my first name is Nora."

"I nearly said it myself," he chuckled, blushing a bit. "Doctor Danny sent these over; I was to tell you they're the first to bloom this year," and

he held out a bunch of tea-roses, the kind I was remembering so well in the doctor's garden.

"Sure, is he as daffy over them as ever?"

"More daffy every year. I was also to say he hoped you would be coming for tea in the garden as soon as you had the rocking of the sea out of your legs."

He blushed and chuckled again, "Those were Doctor Danny's words, not mine."

He turned to go, but I hindered him. "Wait a bit. Will you not be stopping to meet Herself?"

"Sorry, but not this time. I have to be beating the stork to the other end of the county; and he's a fast-flying bird, for all his age." He started down the hill on a run.

"I hope you keep him popular hereabouts," I called after him. "They're after thinking him a bit old-fashioned in the cities over yonder."

"Maybe that's because we're working him overtime here," he chuckled back, jumping into his car. "*Slan leat*, Nora Kelley, and remember you are to be coming over soon to tea. You—and the young lady."

I watched him go, till the dust he had raised settled again; then I went inside to my dearie. She was sitting by the window with papers across her knee and a pencil in her hand.

"That was Doctor Danny's lad. Did you see him?" I asked.

"No, but I heard him. Is he as big as his voice? It sounded as if it could carry into all the seven counties at once."

"It's a gentle voice; you never heard an Irishman with aught else. And he's not so big you can't be seeing him easily with the one glance; but—" and I stopped for a breath while I gathered my wits and thanked the saints I had kept myself back just in the nick of time from acting like a half-wit.

"But?" asked Herself, sweetly, for all the mockery in her eyes.

"But there's naught there to boast about. Barring his hair, which is a bit redder than most, and his eyes, which are too dark to be a good color, he's not different from the general run of lads in this country or the other. What are you doing?"

I changed the subject before she could get a chance to weary of it.

"Writing. I've thought of an excellent idea for a story, a long story."

"And is it Irish?"

She shook her head. "It's to be a modern story of things as they are. If it is ever published, the critics will classify it under the school of realism."

"I'm not liking the sound of it," said I, and I went back to the terrace to hunt for that shamrock.

There were strange weeks that followed. I went for the tea-drinking in Doctor Danny's garden, but Herself would neither be coaxed nor dragged thither. She couldn't be leaving her work; the story was going too well to be interrupting it with anything so trivial as tea; she didn't care to be chatting just then; and a score more of excuses which turned my heart sick.

It was her father over again. When he had lost the thing dearest to his heart, he set himself feverishly at a poor substitute, till it had him burned out entirely; and I was to be seeing my dearie taking the same trail. Maybe there was some virtue in the story she was making; but I wasn't liking what she said of it, or the way she looked working at it; or, by the same token, was I liking the growing bitterness in her and the edge to her tongue.

It was like a gardener watching the one bloom on the fruit-tree, pruned and trained to the sunniest wall of the garden, watching it while the petals dropped and the fruit formed and ripening-time came to hand; and then seeing a blight strike it, and it wither in the face of all the sunshine and cures a body knows.

After the first flash of interest the day we came into Ireland there seemed to be nothing that took her eye or her fancy. The people we had talked

of together and she had been so keen to be knowing, she barely heeded when they came; the places I was to take her to, the castle and the abbey, the Sisters' School at Ballyshannon, the faery raths where so many of the tales had been made, she never asked after one of these, if she was remembering them at all. And all the beauty of the hills of heather about us, the green, green fields, the gray cliffs and the blue bay beyond, it might have been so much brick wall and pavement, for all the gladness it brought her.

Even Doctor Danny could not rouse her, though she was more patient with him than any other. As for the lad, she noticed him no more when he came than if he had been another thorn bush taking root on the knoll. I could have laughed at the two of them, for he was as blind as she, if my heart had not grown so heavy with thinking.

One evening Doctor Danny drew up with his old mare—he had never taken up the new-fashioned way of getting about the country—and I could see there was news with him. He settled down in the biggest chair we had and drew the childeen over to be lighting his pipe, a custom between them.

"Well, lassie, are ye remembering that Midsummer Eve's but a few days off, and ye were to have your wee shoes all polished and ready against

dancing a faery reel?" He caught the hand as she blew out the match, and patted it.

She laughed a bit sharply.

"Perhaps you had better be bringing along the alcohol, after all. For if we should see a faery I might still be doubting it in the cold light of the next morning. You might have to convince me all over again, and you'd need the strongest evidence you could get."

She wrinkled her forehead and started counting on her fingers, "Midsummer Eve—let me see. Yes, I ought to have my book finished Midsummer Eve. Think of finishing a study in realism on the anniversary of a faery festival!" And the sharp laugh came again.

Doctor Danny had something on the tip of his tongue, all ready to drop, but Doctor Fox came striding up the slope that minute and stayed the fall.

"The luck rise with you!" he called ahead of himself, and then, as he swung himself down on the step near our chairs, he added to Doctor Danny, "Have they agreed?"

"Faith, I haven't told them yet. What a way ye have of stealing the words out of an old man's mouth," and he shook a good-natured fist at the lad. "We'd been talking of Midsummer Eve—a far cry from what fetched me."

"Well, supposing you tell them now. I haven't long to be staying; and I'd like to have the word to carry over the hills with me."

Doctor Fox stretched out the long length of him on an elbow, half over the door-sill and half on the grass. Sure, there seemed more to him than ever, stretched out that way.

"Ye tell them yourself. I haven't had a good draw at my pipe yet and it will soon be going out." Doctor Danny settled back in his chair with the pipe between his teeth.

"Between the two of you," I laughed, "we'll be getting no news at all."

It was the lad in the end who told. It seemed that what with the stork and the fever and a scarcity of good food through the winter, there was more than the usual amount of sickness that spring. The hospital was crowded down to the last cot, and there were cases out on the hills needing good nursing. They had been sending up extra nurses from Dublin and Queenstown when they could, and Doctor Danny had had them to use for district work; but for some reason the extra supply wasn't forthcoming this year.

Over-rushed themselves, with miles of country to cover each day in every direction, the two were beginning to grow fearsome that the Grim Reaper

would be gathering in an early and plentiful harvest.

"If we had some one to leave behind us over the fighting hours—a woman with sense and a woman's knack of nursing—why, we could beat the old scythe-bearer double as many times." The lad leaned forward eagerly and looked from the childeen to me.

"Meaning?" said I, knowing well his meaning.

But Doctor Danny pulled free of his pipe and answered, "Meaning there's a pair of idle, lazy women come to these parts lately, who would be better off if they had work to do. What do you say, Nora?"

"There's one ready," said I, "though she's making no boast whatever of great wisdom or knowledge of nursing."

"Didn't I tell ye!" Doctor Danny shook his head at the lad again. Then he leaned over and pinched the childeen's cheek softly. "And what says the wee lassie? Are ye willing to ride and fight with old Doctor Danny for the price of a few more childher spared from the reaping?"

We sat there silent for a moment, the three of us, with our eyes hard on Herself. In my mind there wasn't a doubt of what answer she would make, even though it might be given ungraciously and sounding a bit sharp. And when the answer

was long in coming, I made it for her myself, so sure I felt.

"Of course she'll be having her hand in it; you needn't be asking."

Then it was the change swept over the childeen's face, leaving it, for the time, bare of all sweetness and womanhood, while the knife-blade look came into her eyes.

"You're quite wrong, Nora. I should only make a bungle of it and be more harm than help."

"Why not leave that to us, lassie—" Doctor Danny began, coaxingly, but she turned on him, taking the words and breath from him with her sudden fierceness.

"I tell you—no! I don't care for nursing or children. I know I should do it badly; and it isn't kind or fair to ask me to do something I know nothing about and can't do decently. Besides, I have my work; that's taking all my time for the present." She rose from her chair quickly and started toward the door to go in.

Before she reached the threshold, Doctor Fox was on his feet, barring the way.

"Nursing and children are a woman's part of the day's work. Because you're not taking to it now, just, is that any reason for going through life shirking it?"

Herself laughed, and where it had pricked before it cut deep now.

"You're really very old-fashioned and behind the times up here, if you think it matters any longer to us what a man thinks a woman's work is. Oh, I know it used to be man's privilege to mark it out for us and say just what we should and shouldn't do; but that was long, long ago. For many years we've been pulling up the boundary stakes you have driven down so carefully for us, and now we choose whatever work appeals to us most. And it's more than likely not to be the old stay-at-home drudgeries of children and sweeping and baking and mending."

The two stood staring at each other with fighting eyes and unsheathed tongues.

"And I haven't a doubt you would call it a grand bit of work if, instead of asking you to nurse the children, I had begged you to organize a suffrage club among the women of the hills and teach them they are above minding their cabins and bearing children."

There was a biting sarcasm in the lad's tone that gathered substance as he went on.

"The world is full of women too selfish or cowardly to have children themselves, who ease their consciences by coaxing other women into thinking along with them that child-bearing is

only for the lowest of humanity and the beasts who know no better. Aye, 'tis a grand way of thinking and preaching! I'm only hoping time will mend the notion for you."

Herself ducked him a mocking courtesy.

"I'm much indebted to you, Doctor Fox, for your broad, generous opinion of us. And may I add that I hope time will mend your manners as well as your notions." Like a shadow she darted under his arm and through the doorway.

I was too dumfounded to know that the person who first broke the silence was myself, and I was saying in a voice the color of a wake: "I mind in the Bible that the devil once entered a herd of swine. Do you think, now, that he could creep, unbeknownst, into the heart of a king's daughter?"

I felt Doctor Danny reach across the darkness to me and there was comfort and understanding in the pat he gave my arm.

"There, there, Nora. Don't ye take it too much to heart. Mind, there is still a bit of the Hungry Grass left, and be patient till her feet strike the clean, open road again."

I looked to see what the lad would be saying; but he had gone, like another shadow, down the hill, and in another minute came the sound of his car humming homeward. I hated to have him

go without a word, fetching away with him that judgment of Herself.

Hadn't her whole life, from the time of the childher and the house under the lilac bush, been set to the music of motherhood? Hadn't the dream of it grown with her, and all her growing up unconsciously been fashioned toward it? And when the man came she loved, aye, or thought she did, didn't she bare the very soul of Herself to him, all a-throbbing with the dream and the longing there? And he flung it back at her as a foolish, worthless fancy, something unwished for and best trampled on. Is there anything more cruel on God's footstool can happen a woman than that? Unless it is the murdering of her unborn child.

So, thinking it over, it was no wonder to me that the childeen, in her trouble, had turned Peter and denied the holiest thing in her life.

The next day I set about my nursing. From the first I could see how great was the need of all the help they could get. The two doctors had made so little of the sickness and misery about, by the side of what I saw with my own eyes, that I marveled that there was no discouragement in them and they could keep working with so much heart and hope.

In the days that followed I was in half a dozen

cabins, nursing, broth-making, soothing fretful children, and cheering tired, sleep-worn mothers with the surety that the worst was over. There was good to it and bad to it, but, Holy Mother, I was glad I had it to do!

In that time I saw little of the childeen, a glimpse and a word coming and going, that was all. She was working away like a soul possessed at her book, putting me in mind, more and more, of her father in those days when the music was gone and he was fighting off his feelings with the mad money plunges in Wall Street.

On Midsummer Eve, Doctor Danny brought me home a good four hours before sundown. He left me with orders that I was to rest till evening, when Doctor Fox would fetch both of us over for tea in the garden. And I was not to be taking 'no' from the childeen this time; that was the strictest part of the orders.

As I stepped over the door-sill Herself looked up from a great stack of papers littering her lap and the floor beside her. Her cheeks were flushed and excitement was in her eyes.

"It's finished, Nora, the book is finished! I can't wait to read it to you. Don't bother putting your things away; sit down just where you are. I'm so anxious to hear what you think of it."

"You'll hear, I'm thinking." I said it under

my breath; aloud I gave her Doctor Danny's message, adding, "I'll listen to the reading on the condition that you'll go when Doctor Fox comes. Mind, you promised Doctor Danny Midsummer Eve long ago."

"All right; only do sit down."

I sat, and for the space of two hours or more I held my peace, listening to the pitifulest string of ideas and happenings that could tumble out of the mind of a wee lass like Herself. It was as if she had taken a pot-stick and stirred up to the surface all the sourest dregs of human existence.

There was much I had felt and seen back in the *dun* in the lives of the city about us, that I was glad to be leaving at the bottom and not thinking about; but the thought had never taken me that the childeen had been feeling and seeing the same. Maybe it was like some disease; in a healthy condition it didn't affect a body, but let the system get reduced and the attack was sure to come.

It was a tale of free love; a man with a wife that didn't suit, and a girl with modern ideas. Love was to be everything between them; and they forswore children, conventions, common decency, aye, and God Himself—as far as I could see. The whole thing made me sick and I was glad I couldn't be seeing my own face when Herself looked up at the end of the two hours.

"It's strong, isn't it, Nora?"

"Aye, it's strong. But I'm thinking so is foul air and dead water, filth and carrion; and it's not pleasant to be smelling them."

"Then you don't like it?"

"Did you think for a moment I did? How does it end?"

"Don't you want me to finish it?"

"Faith, I've soaked in enough of it already to be feeling a bit strong myself. You might put the rest of it into half a dozen words; I'd be liking it better so."

Her lips curled mockingly.

"I suppose you expected I'd be writing a pretty, little story—the kind that sells by the car-load and people get sad and weepy over. But prettiness isn't one of the main factors in the lives of real people who are not afraid to live."

"Is that so?" and I'm full of the shame to say I curled my lips as mockingly as her own. "Well, I'm thinking you'll find in lives what people put into them, nothing more nor less. And if it's prettiness, then it's prettiness, and if it's ugliness, then it's ugliness; but the choosing rests with them. And what's more, I'd not be having the stench of a tale like that follow you for always. God knows there are writers aplenty filling the nostrils of the world over-full as it is, and there's

no need of one more. Now that it's finished, what's in your mind to do with the book?"

"Have it published, of course. What did you think?"

"Faith, I'm thinking 'twould make grand fuel for one of the faery fires this night instead."

I leaned forward and gripped the two of her hands.

"Don't do it, dearie! Don't send it anywhere for fear it might be taken and the memory of it trailing after you for the rest of your life. It would be as bad as the tales they tell of poor souls in purgatory having to drag chains after them till the judgment day. Burn it up now; and if you can't make up your mind to it yet, put it by for a month. I would be willing to wager away the whole of County Donegal—which isn't mine—that after you've read it again at the month's end you'll be glad to be smelling the good, clean smoke it will make in the burning."

She snatched her hands away and there was a bit of everything in the look she gave me: anger, hurt, disappointment, sorrow, and resentment.

"You treat me still as a child—a child with a child's idea of the world and of sorrow. Oh, can't you see I've grown old—so old and hard and bitterly wise since winter!"

"Aye, I can see," said I, gently, "but there's no

reason for wishing you to bide so. 'Tis the first real favor Nora ever asked of you, dearie! Aye, and what are you thinking the three back yonder would say to a tale like that! Think, just, and put it by for a month."

Her mouth softened and a hint of the old smile crept into the corners of it. Without another word she gathered up the papers, put them by in her trunk, and set about dressing for tea in the garden.

Sure, the two of us couldn't have gone to a better place to sweep the memory of the tale out of our five senses and leave us breathing fresh and free again.

We sat among roses—roses on bushes, roses on trellises, hedges of them, walls of them, and every kind and color you could be wishing. On one side lay Donegal Bay, clustering the Green Isles in its midst; on the other, afar off, rose the gray hills of Tyrone; while close at our feet rose a slope of close-cropped green, crested at the top by the oldest faery rath in the county.

"If they dance anywhere at all to-night, 'twill be there, lassie."

Doctor Danny had drawn his chair close to the childeen, to be helping her better with the tea things, which he had made old Hannah put by her for the serving. "There are more tales of the

faeries from that one fort than there are grasses growing there this minute."

He turned with a laugh to me.

"Do you mind, Nora, the pipe that Johnnie O'Friel found there when ye were a wean, that he never smoked out for twenty years? And the *sidheog* bush that Michael Baron's father was for cutting down and the blight of the withered hand he got for his trouble; and the white faery cow that Manus MacManus picked up on his way from the county fair, and which bore him seventeen calves as white as herself?"

He ended with another laugh.

I nodded. My mind was busy with the look on the childeen's face. It might have been the color of the roses about us, or the sheen of the sky overhead, but it seemed to me a touch of the old radiance was coming back to it along with the starry look in the eyes. Maybe the writing of the book had been a good thing, after all. Who knows!

"And do ye mind the night Granny Molloy, in the cabin that used to stand in the hollow between the rath and the sea, pulled the wee man out of the pot of stirabout?" Doctor Danny's voice brought me back to myself.

"Aye. And how she was showing off the gold bit he gave her. Sure, wasn't I at the midsummer fair myself when the poor soul spent

it for the shawl and shroud she was laid out in the next winter!"

We laughed together like a parcel of children, while the lad and Herself looked on as if they thought us the same.

"Does the next to the best doctor in Donegal have the eye and the heart for the faeries as well?" I asked, looking at the lad.

"The heart, but not the eye, I'm thinking."

Doctor Fox chuckled and looked over at Doctor Danny.

"He'll be telling you how I spent all the faery nights when I was a lad hunting them—looking for the crock of gold, and the wishing-cap, and staying out all night on a rath to be catching a glimpse of the *slooa sidhe* coming back from a midnight riding. But the luck wasn't with me; and I've never so much as heard the sound of their pipes on Carn-na-ween."

"But ye've never lost heart, have ye, laddy?" Doctor Danny smiled at him lovingly.

"No, nor never shall. I tell you, Nora Kelley," and he leaned forward, a touch of seriousness in his answering smile, "'tis a good thing for a doctor-man to keep a bit of faery-fancy with him always, and I'm not ashamed to be saying it. It acts as a charm against many of the pestering troubles that come knocking at our door and lays

the ghost of many a dim memory we meet stalking the hills yonder. Eh, Doctor Danny?"

So we chatted away the dusk hour—chatted of faeries and charms and things of equally airy substance, there among the roses, drinking our tea.

Night comes slowly in the north of Ireland, and the trail of light from the setting sun never vanishes till the light in the east burns it out at dawn. There was a young moon in the sky; and it hung over the rath, just, for all the world, as if it had been ordered there to light the faery reels. The glowworms were thick among the roses and the air was full of the rustle of wings and sounds that had no body to them. We were under the spell of midsummer, and in a minute more it would have been no surprise to hear the music of faery pipers climbing the hill.

Of a sudden Herself sprang to her feet, her hands clasped across her breast and chin aquiver. "I can't stand it another minute—it hurts so. Why, the place seems full of spirits. I know I shall be doubting them if they do come, and if they don't—I shall always be longing and wishing they had. Oh, you can't understand, I sound so foolish. But I guess it's only ghosts I could believe in to-night." She ended with a sorry little laugh.

Before I could speak Doctor Fox was on his

feet, towering over her. "Then it's in my mind this night to show you ghosts. Will you come?"

He took her hand and drew her gently away from the faery hill toward the road that led from Donegal to Killymard; and, strange to say, she let him without ever a word.

"Remember, Nora Kelley," he called back through the silvery dusk, "it often happens that ghosts walk just before cock-crow. So you best not look for your lass till ring-o'-day."

With that they passed out of sight, and I turned to Doctor Danny. "What's the meaning of it all?" I asked.

"He shook his head. "I'm knowing no more than yourself, unless it is that the lad is seeing that Herself has reached the fringe of the Hungry Grass and it's in his mind to help her over the last of it—if he can find a way."

IX

HERSELF FINDS THE OPEN ROAD AGAIN WITH A LAD'S HELP

WHAT happened the two that Midsummer Eve I learned long afterward, piecing it together bit by bit from what they both told me.

Half-way between Donegal and Killymard stands the cemetery, cresting the sea; and it was hitherward the lad brought her, down the stillness of the road, with the young moon lighting them. She started, surprised, when they fetched up to the low iron fencing, with the markers shining so white in the light beyond.

"A graveyard!" It was a puzzled exclamation from Herself.

"Aye, and why not? I've always understood that graveyards were rather common meeting-places for ghosts; best way to run across them, you know."

The lad spoke like a slow-moving stream, a merry ripple on the surface, but underneath run-

ning deep and strong. He took her hand again, guiding her through the thickets of nettles outside and down between the even rows of graves within. At a white cross he stayed her.

"Read," said he.

And she read, "Mary Carr, aged 19." The puzzlement was growing in her voice. "Who was Mary Carr? I don't understand."

"Sure, and why should you? She was a wee slip of a girl who died long before you were born. Have you never wondered—has no one ever told you why, at seventy, Doctor Danny is alone—unmarried?"

She shook her head.

He pointed down at the granite cross.

"That's the reason. He loved her and she died of the white plague when he was a young man, the most promising surgeon in Ireland and everything before him. And because of her he gave up Dublin, London, aye, all the big places that were clamoring for him, and stayed here among her people of the hills, fighting the thing that killed her. And all he's had to bide with him these forty years is the memory of that slip of a girl and a handful of fancies."

"What fancies?" Herself whispered the question.

"Foolish ones, you might be calling them. He fancies her riding over the hills with him when-

ever death is trying to outstrip him in the race. He sees her there beside him in the cabins, making the fight for another life, with the Grim Reaper hounded back of the door. When it's a child that goes, he always thinks she's there, waiting to take the soul in her safe keeping. And at dusk hour, or whenever he gets home after the long day's work, it's in his mind that she's waiting for him in the chimney-corner as she was on that last day they had together. Foolish fancies, just; and yet they have been enough to keep him climbing from a strong, sound manhood to a ripe old age."

"He might have grown very bitter and cynical."

"Aye, he might have done a score of things: gone back to the big places and the fame there, married for the sake of filling his hearthside, squandered his life away after the fashion of many when it doesn't begin to their liking. Instead, he chose just the memory and the fancies, doing the work he knew she would be wanting him to do; and you can't be seeing Doctor Danny to-day and thinking it was a bad choosing."

She turned her head from him and looked out toward the sea.

"Forty years! It seems an eternity to me. I wonder if there is another—"

The lad said not a word, but led her over to the

last row of graves, where a long mound and a short one lay side by side, with no ornament but white markers. "Read those," said he.

And again she read: "James O'Donnell, beloved husband. Mary O'Donnell, infant daughter of James and Nora O'Donnell."

She turned to him as she had before, for the meaning of these.

"That was the way Nora's life began."

"Nora! Nora who?"

"Nora Kelley."

"Nora Kelley—you mean my Nora Kelley? Oh, you must be mistaken. Nora never married. A husband and a baby girl! Oh, I should have known about it if that was true."

But she saw by his face that it was; and dropped weakly down on the edge of the slope, her hands knotted fast. "Please tell me about it."

"It's all told there."

He smiled down at her gently, and I'm thinking, next to Doctor Danny's, there's not a finer smile in the whole of Ireland.

"Nora was still young; and after it had happened Doctor Danny sent her away to find something that was worth the making of a fresh start. You know what she found."

Herself nodded; her face was from him, but he could see the lips pressed tight together and the

notion took him she would be better off alone. So he went around by the nettles back to the road again; and tramped the length of the cemetery back and forth, till the moon had waned and the first streak of dawn had crept into the east.

He found her as he had left her, barring the lips curved to a wistful smile and redness about the eyes. Silence lay between them on the road home. It was not till they'd reached the foot of the knoll that either spoke, and then it was the lad.

"Sure, ghosts are not over-pleasant for a steady raising; next time let's be making it faeries. Is it a bargain?" and he held out his hand. Whether she was agreeing to it or not I couldn't be telling, but she laid her own wee hand in his.

I was waiting for her just over the threshold, and she took the question out of my mouth with one look I shall never be forgetting.

"And I said I had had nothing real in my whole life—nothing but silly fancies and empty promises. Oh, Nora, I said that!"

Without another word she was gone into her own room and the door closed between us.

I stood there feeling as addle-pated as Paddy himself. For, mind you, I knew nothing of what had happened that night; nor was I knowing till a long time after.

The next day I was caught in seven showers out on the hills, going from cabin to cabin where the patients were mending. And what with the wettings and the excitement of the night before, and little sleep, it was too much for me and I took to my bed that night with the first illness on me in more than twenty years.

It was naught but a bad cold in the chest and an aching of the bones; but when Doctor Danny came for me early the next morning to be helping him with a baby down with croup, I had to be sending Herself out with the word that I couldn't leave my bed. I could hear the two of them talking in low voices near my window, though I couldn't be making out the words. Then Herself came running back, such a shy, gladsome look on her face.

"Nora, do you think if we sent your sister word and she came and sat with you that I could help Doctor Danny? You see, it's the worst kind of croup and needs such careful watching. Doctor Danny can't spend more than a few hours there at the most; there's a broken leg and two fever cases needing him; and Doctor Fox is at the other end of the county, with no chance of getting back till dark. Do you think you could spare me?"

Spare her! Faith, I could have sung a hallelujah, but I didn't. Instead I held her with a sharp eye.

"Faith, I'm thinking you'll be small help in a bad case. What do you know of croup?"

Her head went up and her chin stiffened. "Doctor Danny thinks I can do it. Of course, I don't know anything; but I've got a little sense and I can follow orders."

"Maybe," I grumbled. "Still, you'll be better than nothing; and 'twill only be a matter of a day or two when I'll be about again."

She shot me the oddest look; then with a last care for my comfort, and gathering up a few things she might be needing, she was away after Doctor Danny.

Illness is not over-pleasant, I'm thinking, but I took solid pleasure with every minute of mine; and what's more, I stretched it out to the last ache, coaxing out the cough and groaning with the memory of what little pain I had had. But the day when I could play-act no longer, and with the disappointment well hidden, myself went out to answer Doctor Danny's next call.

"About again? That's grand, Nora Kelley."

But I was thinking there wasn't as much heartiness in the doctor's voice as there might have been.

"Aye, about, and ready for the next nursing."

I stood with my back to the childeen so she couldn't be seeing my face.

"'Twas a misfortune I couldn't be staying that

touch of sickness; but I'll not have to be sending Herself in my place again, I'm thinking, to be doing a work she has no liking for and making your part the heavier."

"Not a bit of it. Why—" I had frowned my face into the image of a gargoyle before I had him stopped. He turned foolishly and went out to his old mare, while I picked up my things and followed him. The childeen looked after the two of us, that wistfully it gave me the feeling of being the most hard-hearted creature in the county.

"Why did ye do it?" Doctor Danny asked, gathering up the reins and clucking to the old mare. "The lass is a wonder at nursing."

"You're an old fool, Doctor," said I, pleasantly. "Aye, I'm knowing as well as yourself that the child's feet are over the Hungry Grass and touching the firm, open road again, as you prophesied. But I'm for having her find out herself that she's liking the road without any coaxing from us. Faith, she might turn about and take to the Hungry Grass again just out of habit; there are those who get to be liking it and miss the mournful sound their feet make, brushing it."

"The lass never will."

"I'm thinking the same; but we'll run no chances. We'll give her a few days of healthy letting alone, with no coaxing or hint that she's

needed; and you can mark my word she'll be dancing after us down the road with her toes hardly touching it, just."

But it wasn't a few days, or, by the same token, a few hours; as I found out when I returned that evening. We hadn't been gone half an hour when the lad dashed up to the bungalow, took the knoll in a couple of strides, and put his head in the door, calling for me.

Herself met him, the wistful look still shrouding her, I'm thinking.

"I'm sorry Nora isn't here. She's just left with Doctor Danny. Would I— Could I do anything?"

He looked her up and down a full minute. "I'm afraid not." And with that he turned on his heel and started down the slope.

She let him reach his machine; then she was after him.

"Listen, please. If there is anything I can do, I want to do it. You know I've helped Doctor Danny for a week, since Nora was sick, and I don't think I've bungled very badly. The croup baby got well; and the dressings I did on little Mickey Donohue's leg must have been all right, for the wound is healing nicely."

Again he looked at her steadily, but he shook his head.

"This isn't a crushed leg or croup; if it was I might be glad of your help."

He climbed into the machine, but she took a firm grip of his arm.

"I don't care what it is. If it needs a woman's help I want to go. I'm not afraid of death or bad accidents or anything where I can help. Please—"

And again the steady look down at her.

"As it happens it isn't any of those—even more out of your line; and you'd not be finding it over-pleasant. If it was a normal case I could manage alone; but there are complications, making it risky. I'd counted on Nora; I'd go back to the hospital now for a nurse if there was time. But I'll try finding a woman in some of the cabins I'll be passing. She'll be better than nothing."

He set the motor to humming, but the childeen stood her ground, her eyes looking straight at him and her chin stiffened.

"Why wouldn't I be better than nothing then? I don't want to beg if I'm not wanted, but you might give me as much of a chance as a woman in one of the cabins."

He stopped the humming. "Very well. I can spare half a minute, just, for you to get ready in. Hurry up."

She had raced to the top of the knoll when he

called after her, and the red in his cheeks had mounted to the roots of his hair.

"If you have anything handy that could go for the fixings of a wee dress, or such like, fetch it along. There'll be nothing ready, I'm thinking."

She never turned nor answered, but nodded her head, as she ran, to show she had heard him. In a few minutes she was back, a bundle of things under her arm, and a look as sensible and as steady as a professional nurse.

"If we need anything else you could stop and bring it out later on, couldn't you?" And that was all she said.

He paid no heed to her for a bit; but just put all his mind on speeding hills and covering the stretches of moorland in the fewest breaths; but he slowed down once and spoke:

"They're young, very young, both of them; and they married with naught much but love to feed and shelter them. The two of them mated with about as much thought of the future as a pair of young rabbits; and I can't help be thinking for their like the Lord should be sending along raiment for the new-born, the same as He does for the wild creatures."

He stopped and chuckled, "Maybe He plans it, just, but the stork comes away in such a hurry he always forgets to fetch it."

I did not see the childeen again for five days. The lad came in that night with word of her and a list of things she was wanting. And after I had brought and bundled them for him, he repeated the very words Doctor Danny had said that morning.

"Nora Kelley, she's a wonder. I can't understand how she ever came to say—"

"I know. But mind you, a lass's tongue is given to waywardness at times; and 'tis never fair to be taking it as a gauge for the heart."

It was the childeen of old times—of the nursery and the *dun*, before Olaf Nielsson had crossed its threshold—that came back to me at day's end. Aye, and like old times, she pulled me down into the nearest chair and sat in my lap; the dreams back in her eyes, and, oh, the starry look of them!

"Nora darling, it's all been too beautiful for words—and yet if I don't put it into words I shall burst."

She pushed off her hat and slipped an arm about my neck. "I never saw such poverty before; they had nothing, nothing! The tiniest cabin with two rooms; you could stand in the middle and reach everything you wanted without taking a step.

"They had one bed, two creepy-stools, a rough table, with two plates, two cups, a wooden bowl, two spoons, and one knife and fork. There was a

kettle, a griddle, and a pot for stirabout, a picture of the Holy Mother, enough 'praties' to do two days, and enough flour to do two bakings. That was all; and not a thing for that baby!"

She laughed softly, "I forgot; there was something ready. What do you think it was, Nora Kelley?"

I shook my head.

"You'd best tell me."

"Yards and yards of the finest crochet lace! Cassie Boyle, that's the little mother, she said she made that because the thread was only sixpence a spool and she had the needle. Think of that, only twelve cents to spend on your baby!"

Her eyes grew misty and she laughed again as she wiped a tear from the end of her nose.

"Oh, I had the best time; and maybe I didn't bless you, Nora Kelley, and the way you brought me up, and the things you had taught me to do! Doctor Fox said there wouldn't be much ready, so I took my white flannel dress, as it was all the flannel we had between us; and your lavender-and-white cashmere waist—did you miss it?"

I shook my head.

"And my white lawn and some cotton cloth I had. Of course, I hadn't a pattern and it was all sorts of guesswork—needle and scissors magic. We had more time, before, than we'd expected;

so I asked Doctor Fox about how long and how wide a new baby was, and went to work. And everything came out just perfectly! It seemed like magic. There was enough in the white flannel skirt to make two blankets; and the waist made a shirt and a petticoat. Of course, there wasn't time for fancy stitches; but I put some in later. You should have seen Cassie's eyes when she saw them!"

The childeen stopped. I knew the memories of those days were crowding in so fast that the words were crowded out. I said nothing and waited; for I wanted the tale to be coming out as the child would tell it. She gave a little sigh at last and squeezed me tighter.

"Doctor Fox was so gentle and thoughtful—he seemed more like a woman then than a man. And he made it all so easy and so beautiful, keeping whatever might be ugly and hurting away from me. He only needed me for the baby. Until she came, he had Conn—that's the father —helping him.

"He told me betweenwhiles what I was to do; so when he came out at last with the funny, wrinkled little lassie in his two hands, I had the kettle over the turf full of warm water, the wooden bowl ready on the table with the other fixings, and enough stitched to cover her decently. And,

somehow, I wasn't a bit afraid of letting her drop, or breaking her, or putting her eyes out. It seemed so natural to be doing it."

Again the silence fell between us, a comfortable silence that let us both be thinking our own thoughts for a space. Then she went on:

"There wasn't any cradle, of course. I asked Conn if he couldn't be finding something; and I had an inspiration and thought of one of those willow baskets, creels, that they use for turf. He went out looking for one, after Cassie was resting quietly. He walked four miles each way, begged a new one from the bog-man, took it to the blacksmith's at the 'corners' and between them they fastened on a pair of rockers. It made the dearest cradle; and I wish you could have seen Conn's face when I had put on the finishing touches and had tucked his daughter in, sound asleep!

"He was digging his eyes with the two of his fists and at last he said: 'Seems like, maybe, we shouldn't never have married, the two of us so young and nothing between us but poverty. But, sure, what's a lass and a lad to do when they're loving each other? And does the Lord or the Holy Book say aught against even the lowest creatures mating? Aye, that's the grandest thing about Doctor Danny and the young lad. Ye'll never hear either of them putting shame on the

poor for having childher. They welcome the poorest wean as heartily as the richest. God bless them both!'"

"And did you leave them doing well?" I asked, meaning the mother and baby.

"Of course, or I wouldn't be here, hugging you this minute, Nora Kelley."

An odd smile crept to the corners of her lips and I could be seeing that there was more yet to the tale. She reached into her bag and fetched out a handful of lace.

"That's the crochet Cassie made. Isn't it lovely? It's going on the christening-dress. There wasn't time to make it there, and I told Cassie we'd do it at home, you and I, out of my white lawn."

"What are they naming her?"

The childeen laughed. "They wanted to call her after me; but when they heard what it was, I knew they thought it must be some heathen name. They kept saying it over between themselves, just as if they didn't like the taste, but were trying their best to get used to it. Poor dears! So I asked them instead to let me be choosing the name for them—a good Irish name."

She looked at me, the starshine growing in her eyes.

"I hope you won't mind, but I chose Nora."

I was awakened in the dead of night by the smell of something. With my wits still asleep, I thought at first it was the house burning, and I sprang from my bed to wake Herself. But the house was as whole as ever and Herself was not in her bed.

A flash of light through the window caught my eye. In a minute it was hidden and I looked to see the figure of some one standing between the house and whatever was burning. I sniffed the air again. This time my wits had cleared and I knew it was the smell of good, clean paper I had in my nostrils.

Across the room I could see the lid of the childeen's trunk was raised. With no one the wiser, I crept back to my bed again, glad with the knowledge that Herself would never be laying foot again to the Hungry Grass.

X

THE CASTING OF THE SHADOW

WITH the interest in the nursing came the interest in the neighborhood about. The childeen hadn't been at it a fortnight before I think she knew every living soul, including the creatures, in the Barony of Tyrconnell.

Aye, she knew their names better than I; and she couldn't be passing the length of the street in Killymard without a trailing at her heels, children first, and after them a scattering of geese, shotes, and a dog or two.

The children near worshiped her. When she wasn't busy at the nursing, she was making dolls for those who had none. She made them out of everything,—potatoes, shavings, rags, and rope—whatever was nearest at hand or the children had brought her; and what with her constant borrowing and fixing of dolls' dresses and wardrobes for the new-born of the hills, I began to grow fearsome that the two of us would soon be without a decent stitch to our backs.

She had a steady invitation to drink tea in every one of the cabins at any hour of the day or night; but the both of us liked best to be dropping in after candle-time. Then, with the peat glowing red on the hearth, and the neighbors dropping in, we were sure to be hearing some grand tales before the evening was spent.

Sometimes a piper would wander in from another county. "Seumas Dubh"—"Black Jamie"—the blind harper from Letterkenny, came often. He came by the knowledge, somehow, that the childeen loved music; and the neighbors said he never played so bravely as when she was by. 'Twas common gossip, and far be it from me to say otherwise, that Seumas had many of his airs from the faeries themselves, having slept often with his ear to the faery rath on Ben-Mor.

"Think," said Herself, "if Daddy May could be getting his music that way, and such ravishing tunes! He works days and weeks—months sometimes, to get a little one to his liking. Couldn't we send for him to come over and get them in Jamie's way?"

"He might come; but I'm afeared he would never be hearing them. There are mortal few ears that can be hearing through the thickness of a faery rath."

Paddy, the half-wit, was another prime favorite

with Herself. Next to the children she liked best to spend her leisure up on the moorland with Paddy, where he tended his geese, listening to the latest news of the Ulster faeries. For Paddy was the only one who you could say was seeing them regularly in those parts. According to him, there was barely a day when they were not 'round pestering him with their company; and he was a rare hand to tell of their doings.

"I can almost see them myself when Paddy's talking," the childeen laughed, after one of her evenings on the moorland. "Mark my word, Nora Kelley, as sure as you're alive I'll be coming back one of these fine days holding the leprechaun tight by the scruff of his neck and getting you to fix him with your eye while he shows us where he's hidden his crock of gold."

She dropped down on the door-step and looked across to the purpling hills and the counties beyond.

"It's a wonderful, wonderful place—this Ireland of yours. So poor, so starved, so tragic; with nothing left of her olden inheritance and glory but the music and the tales that the old people tell at night about their fires; that and the hopes of her people, with their merry wit and their great hearts." She reached out her arms sudden-like to the hills. "Oh, it's good even to be a part of it all for a little while!"

"There are some," said I, grimly, "that are never seeing more than the dirt and the drinking and the pigs running free here. Countries or people or life, just; I'm thinking what you find in them all depends on what you put into them."

It was the next day that the four of us took a holiday, the two doctors and ourselves; and fetched the childeen to Ballyshannon, to the fair there, and to be seeing the Sisters' School. It was a rare day for the going; and sure the childeen's gladness over everything made an old tale fresh and new for us.

To begin with, she had never been at a county fair before and we couldn't keep her from the town diamond. She was held spellbound with the bargaining, the tinkers plying their trade, the trick booths, and the old women peddling their apples and cockles and dilluse.

"It's all unbelievably amazing."

She had Doctor Danny firmly by the arm and her eyes were dancing in the way I loved to be seeing them.

"Over there a farmer from Tyrone is bargaining off his pair of goats for a pair of geese, one pigling, a sack of potatoes; and he wants the other man to throw in the egg the goose has just laid. And down by the tailor's shop there is a Ballyshannon man and a Donegal man trying to drive a bargain

over a donkey with a sore leg and a one-eyed calf. The Ballyshannon man says that the donkey will get well of his ailment while the heifer will never have but the one eye; therefore he thinks that the Donegal man should be throwing in the tethering rope to balance the bargain."

Doctor Fox chuckled. "I'll wager the Donegal man had an argument to beat that."

"He certainly did. He said the donkey would never be anything but a donkey, while the calf would be a cow some day; and he's holding to it till the Ballyshannon man will be throwing in the donkey's halter and piece of harness."

"And the Donegal man will be having his way in the end. You'll see, they always do," and the lad looked down at the childeen with an odd smile on his lips.

From the fair we wandered around the town a bit. The childeen had to be seeing the little shop where Willie Allingham had worked as a printer lad; the falls of the Erne, where the salmon leap in the spring—twenty, thirty feet of them—and the fish manage it as easy-like as if they had wings instead of fins. Aye, there were a score of things she had to be seeing; and afterward we went out to the Sisters' School.

Barring the Sisters themselves, it hadn't changed a whit in all the years I'd been gone. The benches

had the same markings and scratchings on them—the desks the same stains and cracks. There was mine as I had left it, just; and I had to be laughing at the great crack in the top and the way I used to be dropping through twisted bits of paper and playing I was Michael casting the rebellious angels out of heaven and watching them fall through the rift of clouds to the earth beneath. I might better be adding that I only played it when I was sent back to the desk after lesson hours to do penance for one mischievous thing or another.

There was a new Mother Prioress and many of the Sisters had gone, but there were enough left to keep the sadness out; and some of the very children who had been there with me had taken the orders and were filling the places of the Sisters I remembered and missed.

The old, peaceful hush hung over the place; and the convent garden, where we had tea, looked the same down to the very fuchsias coloring the walls, and the gooseberries growing green. As we sat sipping our tea and tasting the shortbread spread with jam made from the last season's gooseberries, Herself had to be telling the Sisters of the garden by the old house, the robins, and the lilac-bush house, the childher and the way we brought them up.

She was full of a hundred memories of the things

I had made or told her, things I had long forgotten; and she spun them into a golden tale for the Sisters' ears that were ever greedy to be hearing good of the children they raise and send out into the world. And all the time the two doctors sat in the shadow of the quicken tree, unheeded by her and listening as hard as the Sisters.

At last, Sister Mary Agnes broke into the memories in the timid way I remembered so well. "Poor dearie. And were you after being a motherless *cailin* then, that no mother was rearing you?"

If I could have wished the words back into Sister Mary Agnes's mouth I would, for all the bad manners it might have been. But there they were, out beyond tongue's reach, and the full of the garden awaiting the answer.

Herself smiled gently back at Sister Mary Agnes. "I suppose I was what you call motherless, but Nora never let me find it out when I was little. After I grew up—what did it matter? Now I know I have had a mother to watch over me, care for me, and love me—all my life."

"I'm believing it's true. Nora was always a great hand for—" but the timid voice of Sister Mary Agnes was scared into her throat by Doctor Danny shaking himself loose from the shade of the quicken tree.

"When are some of ye going to creep out of your garden here and help me with the curing of babies and souls?" It was Doctor Danny's old, teasing complaint with the Sisters. He had kept it up for thirty years, and would, till there was no breath left.

"Doctor Danny, Doctor Danny, is it for your likes to question the different ways the good Lord has of working His will? He has chosen you for His hills; us He has put here within these walls, to tend the sick and the poor He sends to our door, and teach the children." The Mother Prioress spoke with no rancor in her voice.

"Well, all I'm saying is this—and it's a fair warning, mind ye. If the Lord adds another hill to my workshop, I'm going to get special dispensation from the Pope to pick up this convent, walls, garden, and all, and put it down furninst my hospital. And, Nora Kelley, if ye stand blathering there another minute we'll miss the train back and the Lord's work this night will be shirked entirely."

With a laugh, he herded us toward the gate, and, linking his arm in mine, he started down the street to the station, the lad and Herself following.

There was a minute before the starting of the toy train running between Ballyshannon and Donegal; and the lad stopped for a copy of the

Gazette. It was a chance act, none of us looking for news, and we had the way half traveled before the lad even looked at the front sheet.

He read, dallying a minute, and then something caught his eye, something he could not believe, I was thinking, for he kept reading it over and over, his eyes growing wider with each reading. Doctor Danny's eyes were on the lad as well, and after holding back his impatience for a bit, he could bide it no longer.

"Well, out with it! What's the news, laddy? And he gripped him by the knee.

The lad looked up at us bewildered; and for a man as clear-minded and quick-actioned sure that was a strange thing to see in him.

"It isn't possible; it's just a bit of newspaper spiff, of course; but they're rumoring war."

"War!" said I.

"War!" repeated Doctor Danny. "Who are the Turks after this time, lad? Or is it some one after the Turks?"

"No, I mean home war."

"Is the trouble in India, then, or Egypt?"

The lad smiled. "That's just it. It seems absurd, uncanny, to think that war could crop out anywhere in this age except on the fringe of civilization. But in the midst of it—" He broke off, thrusting the paper into Doctor Danny's hands.

"Read it yourself; and you'll be scoffing the idea as a ghost tale."

Doctor Danny read, giving it out to us in single words: "War — Germany — mobilization — the alliance — all in — France — Russia — England — " He threw down the paper and laughed.

"Faith, a parcel of old women and half-wits must have taken their turn for the day at publishing the news. The four biggest countries in Europe tying up each other's commerce and cutting each other's throats. The idea's fit for the madhouse! Not that Germany hasn't wanted to fisticuff England for more years than ye've been gone, Nora Kelley; but she'd never start a fight, with France and Russia bound over against her—not in a thousand years."

And that's the way the four of us thought. It was the way every thinking man and woman thought for the space of two days; and we laughed at the tale of war as if it held no more sense than a Limerick rhyme. We'd have believed anything the papers had printed about war in the East; but anything this side of the Balkans was foolishness. So we laughed at it; and in two days it was upon us.

It was weeks, though, before the horror shaped itself into anything real; and then it came by way of Belgium. When the tales and the refugees came

pouring in from that wee bit of a martyred country, then we believed. But 'tis not a tale of the war I'm telling; and I'm not for bringing in any more of it than I can keep out; only the part that touched on our lives and the unknowing hand it took in shaping our ends.

It was the strange thought to me, though, how we tumbled straight out of the quiet of those convent walls that late July day and found war facing us. And just as I was beginning to think that for ourselves, at least, it held no dreadful meaning, no great threatening loss, the two doctors came up the knoll one evening and gave my thinking the lie. Doctor Danny's arm was resting heavily on the lad's shoulder; and there was a grim set to the two faces that was different from any look I had ever seen there.

"*Ochone!*" said Doctor Danny, dropping into the big chair and giving the old Irish wail of trouble, "*Ochone*, the lad is going."

"Why?" said I, "and when?" For it was in my mind that there were doctors enough loafing about the country, no special help to anybody, who might better be going than Doctor Danny's lad.

"Because he will—that's first; and because he should—that's second. And if ye are wanting a third reason, Nora Kelley, it's because they'll be

taking him anyway, I'm thinking. Holy Saint Patrick, if they would only be taking the old man! The few years left to my life, what are they? But the lad here will be good for a lifetime yet; and with both of us gone, who will be minding our people of the hills?"

"There's no sense to it any way," said I. "If England wants to get into war, let her, along with all the good Britishers that love her; but why should our Irish lads fight for a country they have small liking for and which has done little enough for them? Tell me that!"

"Yes, I know, Nora; but there's another side to the war than the British side."

The lad leaned forward eagerly.

"To begin with, there'll be thousands of the Irish drafted out whether they will or no—there'll be thousands more going with a good will for the sake of the fighting that's born in their blood. 'Twould be a pity, just, if there were not enough Irish surgeons to stand back of those regiments, and march with their lads. And there's this more to it. It is not a war only against England; it's a war against France—against every power that has helped in the past to curb German imperialism and keep it from spreading the world.

"'Twill all come hardest on France, I'm thinking. I, for one, would not be forgetting that in

the days when Ireland was suffering her most 'twas France that gave harborage to every one of our poor, hounded men with English penal laws on their heads. Aye, 'tis the first time Ireland has had a chance to pay back the debt; and I'll be glad to see the Irish lads fighting shoulder to shoulder with the French on their own home land."

"I know, laddy, I know; but still I'm saying '*Ochone*'! Maybe 'tis the loneliness I'm fearing, and the need of ye here; maybe—maybe—I'm grudging ye the chance to go first."

Doctor Danny reached for his pipe of a sudden and put it, empty, between his teeth.

The lad and I looked away. Two channels and two countries lay between us then and the war; but I'm thinking that in all the days to follow, it never seemed so close and terrible as it did those few minutes. The childeen crossed to Doctor Danny, sitting down on his knee. Gently she pulled the pipe from his lips, filled and lighted it, never speaking a word, though, till it was drawing free. Then she slid a hand into his and smiled.

"Ye are an old, deceiving rascal, Doctor Danny," and the brogue was rich on her tongue.

"Ye'd never be standing the disgrace for a day if your lad lagged behind with all the others going. Isn't that true, now? Wouldn't ye be the first to wish him after them?"

She turned Doctor Danny's face toward hers with the free hand and looked down steadily into his eyes.

Slowly his eyes gave in under her look and the smile came to his lips, albeit it was not a merry smile. He dropped the pipe on the grass beside him and pinched her cheek.

"Ye are a bad bit of baggage, lassie, to be raising the latch and trying to peep into an old, musty heart in that fashion. 'Twould serve ye right if ye should get a glimpse of some of the rattling, old skeletons that are hid there, along with some of the preying ghouls and goblins. Eh?"

"'Sh . . . 'sh! Don't ye be telling a soul, but there isn't even a cobweb there, nor a rat in the rafters. It is just a cozy cabin affair, with the front and back doors w de open, the wind sweeping through, and flowers crowding the door-sills." Herself laughed softly.

Doctor Danny joined; and in a moment the lad and I were laughing with them. Not because there was any merriment or light-heartedness in that night for us, but rather because we were feeling how close the four of us were, with the understanding between us; and because we knew, each in his or her own heart, that whatever the future might be doling to any one of us, good or bad, the others would be sharing the dole. That's

a wonderful feeling, just, a feeling as great and gripping as happiness, and that's the why, with the shadow on us, we could still be laughing.

Afterward, in a matter-of-fact voice, Herself questioned the lad about his going: what regiment, where they would be stationed, when they'd be likely to be ordered into action, what chance there would be of letters coming and going, and how long it would likely be lasting.

The answers were meager enough. He was going with the Enniskillen Fusiliers; they would be leaving Omagh in five days. Beyond that he knew nothing. Then he looked at Herself with the shy way he had, more like a little lad than a man grown, and the red mounted to the roots of his hair.

"About letters—there'll be scant time for writing over there, but I'm thinking there'll be time aplenty for reading all that come. Doctor Danny's the worst old gander with a goose quill you ever saw; he'll be getting around to a letter about next Christmas. Do you think, now—would you take pity then—wouldn't there be news to tell—" and he stumbled over the words like a wee lad trying to make out his letters.

Herself wagged her head teasingly.

"Would we think, now—and would we take pity; and where would the news be found anyway? 'Tis too much to guess all at once," and

what did she add but the old Irish saying I had put off some notion of hers with so many hundred times, "The less ye expect, the less disappointment will ever be pestering ye."

With a laugh, she stooped, picked up Doctor Danny's pipe, and set it alight again.

I noticed she was mortal solemn for the five days spanning the lad's departure. They were busy days for us all, for the troubles at home in no way let up for the troubles abroad. Whether it was chance or not, I could not be saying; but it happened that very day it was myself Doctor Danny picked up first with his old mare, leaving Herself behind for whatever need the lad might have of her. And whether it was the same chance that put the idea into her head, or whether they had it planned between them from the first, I cannot be telling.

But the next day, as Doctor Danny and I were jogging back from half-way to Glenties, we were passed on the road by the lad's car, and Herself was driving it. She couldn't be sparing us more than a sideways glance as they passed; but she was waiting for us at the entrance to the rose-garden, where we were to be drinking tea all together for the last time. Her eyes were full of excitement, not the dancing kind, but steady and promising a long burning.

"Did you see—wasn't it fine? Doctor Fox said I could never be learning in five days, but I knew I could. I had to, you see."

She came between Doctor Danny and myself, slipping an arm through each of ours and leading us down the path, the while the lad watched us soberly from between the hedge.

"We're going to keep it in Hughey Baron's shed; and Doctor Fox says Hughey's Mike is a good hand at tinkering and will keep it in good running order."

She looked up at Doctor Danny.

"Don't you see what it means? Nora and I can be the vanguard. Every night you can leave us a list of the cases we're to follow up, with instructions, and we'll divide them between us. We can cover a lot of ground in that car and save you such a lot of going."

"Make ye into another doctor, eh?"

"No, just into a woman." And the childeen's eyes dropped.

We tried our best to put some heart into that tea-drinking, but it turned out a wearisome failure. We were wise enough not to try joking—'tis the poorest way of mending real sadness; and instead we took to planning the months before us—the work we could do, the fresh sewing needed at the hospital, the possible help we might get at

last from the Sisters in Ballyshannon. For many of the nurses would be going to France and Belgium, and who would be taking their places at home but the Sisters of Mercy?

But the talk lagged; Doctor Danny fell to his pipe as if keeping it burning full blast was the biggest bit of business on hand for the nation. The childeen sat, her hands folded, her eyes on the bay and the cliffs beyond, which marked the rising of the Killymard cemetery. The lad sat stripping the leaves off a rose-bush beside him, and left the talk to me.

"'Tis a pity the roses are all blown," said I, natural-like.

"I've never seen the heather bonnier than it's been this year," I added to what I'd said already.

"Tomais, the bailiff, told me the Marquis of Carn-na-ween had granted free rental to every family of every man in his parish who enlists. That's sharing this trouble fairly."

After this I thought I had earned a bit of quiet myself and I took to crumbling the piece of cake on my plate I could not finish for the faeries—that there might be no planting of Hungry Grass for any of us that night.

So we sat on, the silence between us, each feeling safer for keeping things in his heart unsaid. At last the lad rose and went into the house, coming

out a few minutes later with a stack of books under his arm. He put them into the childeen's outstretched hands.

"You'll find everything there that you can possibly need, with a lot more that will be of no use at all. You'll find that first-aid book, and the other on fevers, and what I was telling you about dressings to be really all you'll want."

He turned to Doctor Danny. "Wouldn't be a bad idea, would it, to take them up to the hospital sometimes and let them have a few lessons in bandaging and the like? Times will come when you'll have to be sending them before you, or in your place."

We parted with the lad that night; he would be off for Omagh before the sun was up on the morrow. For all he was not a Catholic, I slipped a blessed relic into his pocket and bound him to the promise of wearing it whenever he came within earshot of a gun, or eyeshot of an airship.

"'Tis an old woman's notion," said I, "and 'twill keep me sleeping easier of nights, if it doesn't save you."

He gripped my hand with the promise; and his good-by was shared between the two of us.

"*Beannacht lib.* I shall be coming back, never fear. Shot or whole, dead or alive, I'm thinking

nothing could keep me away from—from these hills."

The childeen drove us home in his car. All the way from Donegal my mind was harkening back to the memory of that other going, the last thing Olaf Nielsson said the night he was starting around the world. And to the humming of the car I kept saying over and over to myself, "Faith, if there is any sense or reason to anything, the chance that fetched him back into our lives must fetch this lad."

All of which was, I'm not denying, a foolish speech even for a body to be making to herself. For when had chance anything to do with sense and reason? Tell me that!

XI

HERSELF AND HIMSELF

IT was Paddy, the half-wit, who gave the childeen the name that clung to her as long as we bided in Ireland; aye, and is still clinging, for that matter.

It wasn't a fortnight after the lad had gone that Herself was known the length and breadth of Tyrconnell as the "Wee Docthor"; not a fortnight more before the hill people had their welcome for her but a shade less hearty than what they kept for Doctor Danny.

It was the taking over of the lad's car that was partly to blame for this, and the other part was the quiet, steady way she set about her work. She had the rare faculty of putting to the best use every whit of new information or learning she had mastered. We spent two and three mornings a week at the hospital when we could spare the time, picking up everything that might come in handy. We watched dressings and bandagings,

splint-layings, sterilizings and the like till my head buzzed with it all; but Herself took to it and digested it like an Irish boiled dinner.

In the evenings she would be reading aloud from the books the lad had given her, following it up afterward with great arguments between us. She had always a score of questions saved up to ask Doctor Danny; and she never asked a question more than once, I mind that.

"'Tis a miracle, then, the way she takes to it," he would say for the hundredth time. "Give her a year and she'd be worth half the young trained doctors they send out of the universities. What I'd be giving a creel o' red herring to know is, what makes her go at it in this fashion?"

"Aye, what makes her?" I repeated; and we let it rest at that.

Of one thing I soon became certain—the more she did for the nursing the more she did for herself. Whether she knew it or not, she was making ready for life again and whatever it might bring. This time she would not be draining the cup feverishly or blindly; she would take it slowly, tasting and measuring each mouthful. And if, again, the dregs should be bitter she would make no moan.

All the winsomeness, the eagerness, the gentleness were there the same as they had always been; but to them was added strength. Knowing this,

I knew as well that no sudden sorrow, no disappointed passion again could be blowing and bending her like a reed in a tempest.

At the end of two months the folks who fell ill began to send messengers to Donegal with the word if they couldn't get Doctor Danny to bring the "Wee Docthor" and Nora Kelley; so it came about there was many a light case we tended ourselves, taking that much of a load off Doctor Danny and the old mare.

The calls would come at any hour of the day and night: a sick baby, a crushed hand, a fever relapse, and sometimes to watch beside the dying. These were the kind that came to us when greater need took Doctor Danny elsewhere; and always I loved to be seeing the look on the childeen's face when we were making ready to answer the call.

She grew to know Ireland and her people as no dandering tourist ever knows it; and to love it all as if she had been born of her bogs and bred of her stirabout. She came to see the moorland in all its magic moods of mist and rain, sunlight and starlight with the bog-wind brushing it into the semblance of a purple sea, with a lark clefting it with its matin song. She saw the hills covered with gorse; she saw them spreading out green pasturage for sheep and kine. She saw them reaching out barren wastes to the sky with never

brush or tree to gentle them, with stars crowding their crests at night and faery lights dotting the slopes.

And the people? She came to know them for the simple-hearted folk they were, covering their poverty and their sickness with a never-failing wit and a never-wearying faith.

It was small wonder, then, that I found her back at the writing again; and there was no need now to be asking what manner of a tale it would be. She carried scraps of paper about with her; and whenever there was waiting to be done she filled it in with what I came to feel would be the makings of her first book—the book that would blot out for the two of us the memory of that ill-smelling bundle of papers that had lain in her trunk for a bit. Maybe these would be tales of the hill people, with a creeping of Doctor Danny in here and there, for no one could be writing much of the hills and leave Doctor Danny out. I wondered much about them; but I was content to wait until she was ready to show them.

It was September and a month had passed before we had any news of the lad; barring the bits of cards he wrote us each after his crossing. Two letters came—one for Doctor Danny and one for Herself; and they were full of the very lad himself. His regiment, along with the Con-

naught Rangers and the Royal Irish, was up Flanders way, and the lad had seen the gathering in after the first battle.

"It's a sight to make a man grip his nerves," he wrote Doctor Danny. "Even those of us who have seen hospital work aplenty grow a bit white and unsteady over the first stretcher-loads that come; and we begin fumbling our knives and sweating more than a healthy man cares to own to.

"It's not like handling whole men with an injury, as it was back in the home hospitals; here it's getting men by pieces—a half man in this stretcher, two-thirds of a man in that. If there's enough to give us a mending chance, we patch him up the best we can to ship home to those *caoining* for even that much of him. When there isn't enough to patch, we take the home address and fill him full of morphine, so he can travel the other way comfortably."

In the childeen's letter he wrote: "I think the most of us came over with the feeling that we were in for a big slice of history, and whatever we were getting we would relish as something to tell again in the after years. Moreover, it's the Irish way to be laughing at danger and cracking jokes with death.

"But now that we're here, and since the retreat at Cambrai and Le Cateau, it's different, we're

thinking. I'd like to be wiping my mind clean as slate from the memory of those places; for it's a horror too big for one man's brain to carry overlong. And when it's all over I, for one, will be glad to be curing my eyes from the sights they have seen, with the peace of the moorland and whole men once more. Now I am wondering if all the throstles' songs in Ireland can be drowning the sounds that are in my ears."

There was a deal more to the letter than that bit: what he had seen on the march to the border, the big-hearted ways of the French peasants, the work of the field hospital, the stories of the ambulance-drivers who carry the wounded back to the nearest hospital headquarters.

He was filled with admiration, just, for all the men fighting—Allies and Germans alike.

"When it comes to suffering and dying, they're all men, no matter what tongue they speak. And I've found out one thing—no one of us knows what we are fighting for. The French think it's the old quarrel left over from the Prussian War; the Belgians think it's the coming again of the Huns, and civilization fighting to keep home and wives sacred; the British think deeper than either and say less, while the Germans say the only way to have prevented an invasion of the 'Fatherland' was to invade first. But the reason that lies back

of all this—what is it? Not one of us knows; and I'm thinking the world will be little wiser when the last shot has been fired and the last grave dug."

"Then what can keep them all at it?" said I, after the childeen had finished. "Sure, men must be having a reason to be always springing at each other's throat."

But Herself had no ear for my wisdom. She was smiling down the length of the letter at something that was evidently taking her fancy.

"If there's more to the letter than what you've read, I'm ready to be hearing it," said I, knowing myself for a meddling old woman, but not able to hold back the words.

"Why, there isn't very much more. Let me see—he says—he says—"

"Aye, I can just hear him saying it."

Herself looked up sharply. "Nora! I believe you're actually peeved because he didn't write you; and think of the nice messages he sent in Doctor Danny's letter."

"Faith, I wouldn't be having him wasting a stamp and scratching his pen dry for me. But I'm not against hearing the last bit of news he's put in yours."

The pink colored deep in her cheeks as she turned again to her letter.

"The rest isn't exactly news. He says—why, he's been glad of my letters and to please keep on sending them. They've cheered the men up a lot at odd moments—he reads scraps of them aloud. And there was enough heather in the bundle I sent him to give a sprig to all the Donegal and Fermanagh boys. They're wearing it in their caps."

"Well, that's news," said I. "Unless my wits have gone dallying, 'tis the first I've ever heard of your sending heather."

She looked at me a bit reproachfully.

"The idea tumbled into my mind one day I was coming back from Killybegs. You know the place by the peat-bog where the heather grows the finest. Well, I couldn't help thinking how glad it would look to some of those boys at the front. I gathered my arms full and sent it on my way home. I'm awfully pleased the boys did like it."

After that, I noticed the childeen was as keen for news-gathering as for nursing. Wherever she went, she was picking up the happenings from this town or that; chatting with the carriers, questioning the men home from a fair, reading the Ulster papers whenever she could lay her hands on one. And all this would be going into the next letter to the lad.

"Tell the boys from Tyrone that it was Peter

O'Shea's mare, Banbă, that took the prize this year," she would be writing. Or, "Maybe the Derry lads haven't heard of the death of John Daly, of the *Journal*. He was thrown from his horse, and Patrick Keogh is succeeding him." Or, "Donegal is having a fine run of herring this fall. So far, John Hegarty's boat at Inver leads the catch, taking twenty-two barrels in one day."

"I feel as if I'd been editing the personal column in the Derry *Journal*, myself," the childeen laughed after reading it to me.

"And were you after saying there was more to the letter than that?" I asked.

She gave me a firm look of the two eyes. "I wasn't saying." And with that she slapped my cheeks gently and went her way.

From the other side we heard rarely; and the papers had pitifully little to tell us. Word of disaster or death traveled quickest; and often and often we heard of the last movement and fighting of the regiment through the news sent home to the mothers of the lads who had been killed.

I had thought, when I first came back to Ireland and took up the nursing, that the country was then bearing its full dole of trouble and misery; but the war gave me the lie. Here was a new burden of sorrow and misery to cram the already over-

burdened poor. So many of the lads that went were "the one son" standing between old age and the workhouse.

Winter came fast upon us. The fall rains were over, the kine housed in the byres, the "praties" dug, the turf stacked close under the eaves—enough to keep the hearth burning bright through the long, cold nights and a winter's harvest of tales.

Then it was that any who had idle hands took up the knitting for the lads in the trenches. We had written back to the three in America of the need of yarn, and gauze for the dressings; and they had sent us the money we lacked. In this way we were able to supply work for any one asking it; and many's the time we blessed the three for keeping us from sitting idle and awaiting the next news of the war and the lads that would be listed.

Christmas came. The bit of money left from the yarn and gauze we spent on the children and the poorest. There was pitifully little we could do; and what we had to leave undone was enough to take the heart out of the blithest body. But we filled a meal-chest in one cabin; the "pratie"-sack in another. To a third we sent tea and sugar and a baking of bread; to a fourth a creel of turf and the full of a kettle of broth.

None of it was what you could be calling handsome Christmas fare; and when I thought of the baskets filled in America with turkey and vegetables, pudding, nuts, and sweets, and what not, I could have blushed with the scantiness of our gifts.

But, sure, what a body has never seen will never trouble him; and none of the hill people were pestered by the memory of an American Christmas. For all the children Herself and I baked currant cakes and made wee bags of sweets. It was months since any of them had tasted anything half so grand, and it put a deal of pleasure into our own Christmas.

It took us nearly the whole day to be fetching the things about—that and the stopping in every cabin to neighbor a bit. On the way going we met Doctor Danny, and he speeded us on what he called "the work of good human hearts."

A mile further on we met Father Mat Hugh, and he blessed us for "being about the Lord's business." When we stopped at Paddy's cabin to leave our first dole, he asked us were we "takin' a hand at helpin' the faeries?"

"And back in America they'd be calling it 'Santa Claus.'" The childeen laughed. "It's funny—the different ways the world has of explaining a piece of plain kindness."

"It doesn't matter much, I'm thinking, whether

it's laid at the door of humans, faeries, saints, or God, so long as it's kept alive in the world."

The childeen looked up at me quickly, her face strangely sober.

"Nora, I wish you'd tell me honestly how long it takes before a person can stop searching about for her own happiness and be content with the lives and happiness of others. Does it take years of trying? And at the end, doesn't one still want one's own life? Honestly, now?"

"Don't you be worrying, dearie. Nora has the sure feeling you'll be having a life of your own some day, and it bursting with happiness. What put the notion in your head, anyway, to ask me that?"

"Because I knew you could answer it better than any one else—unless it's Doctor Danny," and she went on to tell me of Midsummer Eve and the white markers.

So that was the meaning of many things I had been able to make no sense out of whatever; and that was what had stayed her feet from crossing back to the Hungry Grass. Though I would never have told her myself, I was glad she was knowing—glad there was nothing now left untold between us. I looked at her and saw she was still waiting for an answer to the question she had asked.

"I'm thinking 'tis this way, dearie." I spoke slowly, for I wasn't sure entirely that my tongue could find what was in my mind. "I'm thinking happiness is much like a wee wild rabbit—chase it to its warren and you'll never be catching more than a glimpse of its white stub of a tail. But leave it be; set your foot to the sand-dunes and your face to the sea, and the first thing you know it's after you. The odd part of it is that you'll find it every bit as curious and eager as yourself, and tamed to your hand. Mind you, though, I'm not saying it's always the same rabbit you've been chasing—more than likely it's another."

"But that's just it. Can a person be satisfied with any happiness that comes along? Is it really happiness when it isn't the thing you've wished for?"

"Maybe not, for some folks. Faith, the world is choked with folks who just naturally *caoine* for discontent—who are always wishful for the thing that passes them by and goes on to their neighbors. But if ever you turn into one of them, dearie, sure I'll never own to your raising."

She gave a little, tired sigh.

"And how long does it take, Nora Kelley, to turn your face to the sea and be content with whatever follows after you?"

I laughed and hugged her close.

"That's the gladsomest part of it all. Once you've your mind made to it—the worst is over. Then all in a whist you catch yourself being glad—glad you're alive—and you're making out with the tail of your eye a hundred different happinesses that you never thought were in the world at all."

She looked a bit doubtful as she smiled. "If you say it, it must be true; only just now it seems harder to believe than the faeries."

The new year came and with it our work grew. We had a hard time of it raising our godchild, Nora Boyle. She took everything a wee infant could be thinking of, and the parents seemed too young and afeared to be braving a day's illness alone with her.

We were anxious about Paddy as well. For weeks he seemed failing and never put foot outside his cabin, the neighbors and ourselves fetching him food and caring for him. Aye, it was a hard year for the very young and very old; and Herself and I grew used to making shrouds and laying the cross between dying hands.

Lambing time came; but sure the sheep seemed the only ones that had strength or heart for the new-born that spring. Doctor Danny said he had never known the stork to fly so sparingly across the county or the register to hold so few new names—not since the famine times.

But for all the gloom that hung over Ireland and beyond the sea, never was there a fairer spring; hawthorn crowded the roads with white and primroses flashed their bloom everywhere. On the heels of spring came June; and before we knew it, another Midsummer Eve was at hand.

Again we gathered in Doctor Danny's garden and had our tea among the roses. As old Hannah fetched the things and laid the cloth it was not of the faery-doings we talked this time, but of the war. And the thought came scrooching into my mind a dozen times—would any faeries or fancies be left Ireland if the war lasted much longer?

News had come the day before of the fighting at Festubert. It was a wonderful piece of daring; and for all the horror in it we could not keep the pride out of our hearts as we told over again of the bravery of our Irish lads. A surprise attack had been planned on the German trenches; two regiments had been ordered out for it. The Liverpool Irish fought their way across, losing their officers and half their men, but making one trench; the other regiment was shot down almost to a man. The officers watching back of the lines knew something must be done, aye, and done soon, if the handful of men in the one trench were to be saved. It was night by now, and the Enniskillen Fusiliers were ordered to cross under cover of the

dead as soon as it was dark enough, and attack when the signal came.

Holy Mother! I can see the picture that the news fetched out clear in my mind: the blackness of the night, the two rows of trenches, far enough apart to seem miles to the men spanning the distance; shadowy forms crawling on their bellies, like eels, through a sea of mud and corpses, pulling their guns after them; and a star-shell bursting every now and again over them, ready to give them away to the enemy if a man so much as stirred among the dead.

Those that came back to tell of the night say that the crossing seemed to take till the Judgment Day itself. It was fearful—the reaching out of a sudden to feel the cold face of a dead comrade, the stench of gas, the lying still when the bombs burst, knowing any minute they might be as dead as those they were shamming; and, at the end, to lie within a stone's throw of the German side, faces down, suffocating, yet not daring to breathe till the signal flare. Can't you be seeing the picture of it yourself, and feeling the spirit in those lads?

They took the trenches with small loss to themselves; and held them till daybreak, when that whole division of the army swept up and took possession of the border there.

"And I'm wondering, just," said Doctor Danny, "where was our lad the while?"

The childeen said nothing, but it was easy telling she had been wondering the same.

"He was back of the lines, I'm thinking, waiting for the morning's dole from the space between the trenches. Faith, where else would he have been?"

My tongue sounded a bit tart, for I didn't like this business of wondering.

The childeen put down her cup of a sudden and went over to Doctor Danny, curling up in the grass at his feet and slipping a coaxing hand over his knee.

"Let's not begin to wonder—it puts such silly, worrying ideas into one's head."

Her voice took on an eager wistfulness. "Let's just say, he's safe somewhere, fighting hard for the lives of those poor, shattered boys that are brought to him. Oh, I can't bear to put him anywhere in that dreadful picture at Festubert!"

"Sure, then, we'll leave him out entirely." Doctor Danny patted her head. "Just say the word, lassie, and instead I'll be painting a grand picture of himself getting a furlough and coming home all unbeknownst to us. We'll be sitting in the garden here—same as to-night—and the first thing we're knowing there's a click of the latch

and a scraping of feet on the gravel, and there's the lad, as natural as life, not an inch of him gone, nor the glory of his hair dimmed."

"His hair isn't red at all. And who wants a little Irishman? Back to back you measure the same—I know you do."

"Have it your way, lassie." Doctor Danny gave a teasing pinch to her cheek. "Nearly a year gone. Sure, his hair may be gray by this time. Now what do you think would be the first word he shouts from the gate yonder?"

"Being a man, and a year on starvation fare," said I, "'tis more than likely his first word would be for Hannah in the kitchen. And I'm thinking it would be a shout for a beefsteak and kidney pie."

The two of them laughed; and, somehow, we turned our eyes together toward the gate. It creaked even as we looked to let Tomais, the bailiff, in. He walked slowly down the gravel. 'Tis not the custom of bailiffs to walk slowly; moreover, I was not liking the look on his face or the bit of crumpled paper in his hand.

"God help me! I never fetched ye bad news afore, Docthor," and he stood on the one foot, his face covered with trouble over his errand.

"Ye never did, man. But ye'd best out with it quick. Keeping doesn't ease the telling."

Tomais looked down mournfully at the paper he held. "'Tis the list—then—the last one in—" he mumbled the words.

Herself was on her feet in a minute, the paper snatched from him. "I don't believe it! I wouldn't believe it if I saw it written there a thousand times. Doctor Danny's lad killed? Never!"

She turned with a wild, little cry to Doctor Danny, who was already huddled in his chair, a hopeless misery clutching him. She shook him gently.

"Oh, you mustn't believe it—you mustn't. It will break the very heart of you. They make mistakes that way every day—lots of the lads reported dead or missing come home. Besides, surgeons are hardly ever wounded. Perhaps it's a private of the same name—perhaps—" She uncrumpled the paper and her eye went quickly down the list.

I think I saw it as soon as Herself, for I was looking over her shoulder. There it was, as plain as any printed news can be: "Fox—John, Donegal, surgeon, 2d Enniskillen Fusiliers, Festubert, June 16th."

"Aye, 'tis there, plain as a marker," said Tomais, grimly.

The childeen's face had gone white and her chin

was all of a quiver, but her eyes still flashed with the gripping faith in her.

"I don't care—I don't care what anybody says or any paper prints—I don't believe it's true."

She dropped down again on the grass beside Doctor Danny, and again the coaxing hand went on his knee.

"Promise me you'll not be believing—not until there's no hope left?"

Tomais looked at the two with a thoughtful eye; then he leaned toward me and whispered. "Maybe she's right—for all what's printed. Do ye think, Nora Kelley, if I could be taking a week or so off, 'twould be a bad idea for me to be going to Dover and looking over the lads coming in from the hospitals? Sure, he might be among them, or there might be them bringing news of him. I'd be after givin' a year's pay to be liftin' the load o' sorrow off them poor old shoulders I've had a hand at heavin' on this night," and he shook his head pityingly at the bowed figure in the chair.

"Aye, go," said I, "and the luck go with you. But say never a word to the two yonder. If it's good news, 'twill bear keeping; and bad news is a poor substitute for hope."

That night the childeen faced me, a touch of the old fierceness back in her voice and the closed fists.

"Lose his lad after everything else? Why, Nora Kelley, it just couldn't happen! Oh, I know—the war is piling up tragedies like that every day—hundreds of them in the papers and more we never hear about. But I still believe Doctor Danny's lad will be spared."

"Don't you be losing your grip on it then. There's naught like believing, when all's said and done."

But it was easy seeing that Doctor Danny thought otherwise. It was another man who drove behind his old mare in the days that followed—a man grown old and stooped in a night, with the heart and faith took out of him, and who only played at hope when the childeen was by to see.

I heard from Hughey Baron's Mike who looked after the car that Tomais, the bailiff, had "gone skylarkin'." That was all the word any one got of his going; and for days and days I was hearing nothing. Two weeks passed, and three.

I was wakened in the deep of the night by the scratching of a hand on the glass of my window.

Peering out, I spied Tomais in the pale light of a waning moon, looking like a cross between a thieving tinker and a bishop giving the benediction.

"Whist!" said he, his hand over his mouth.

I whist, and opened the window carefully to hear better what had fetched him.

"Faith, I've got him yonder in the hospital—the rascal!" and he grinned all over.

"Not the lad!"

Tomais looked disgusted.

"What did ye think I went after—a Dutchman?" But for all his disgust he couldn't be keeping it. "Aye, 'tis the lad—or what's left of him. Fetched him in on the night train; and hung around like a sheep-killin' dog all this time, afeared to tell Docthor Danny."

"He's not—"

But he took the words and the worriment from me.

"Of course he's not dyin'. Do ye think if I couldn't have fetched him home with better prospects than them I'd have fetched him at all? No, it's just that the docthor's wearied so I'm a bit afeared o' the good news. Ye'll be a better hand at breakin' it, Nora Kelley; and I'd tell it easy-like to the lass, too, if I was ye."

"Any more directions?"

"Ye might tell them that, what with searchin' the trenches for men to patch, under steady fire o' the guns, and layin' out aftherward for a day or so among the corpses, it hasn't improved his looks any. Do ye know, I was thinkin' when I clapped eyes on him first that he sure had the makin' of a grand corpse himself."

There was no more sleep in that night for me; and, foolish or not, I had to be waking Herself before the ring of day to tell her.

Shall I ever be forgetting her face? It went first white, then pink as the dawn; while the sheen from the dew on the grass crept into her eyes. She was out of bed in a flash, tumbling her clothes and crying that we must waste no time in getting to Doctor Danny. We did not have to be telling him at all. We found him pothering about his roses in the garden; and one look at Herself coming through the gate gave away the news entirely. He dropped his pruning-shears and stood with arms outstretched to gather her in.

"Lassie, lassie! And ye had more faith than I."

She drew down his head and laid her bit of a cheek to his.

"Hush! you mustn't say that. Who was the first to teach me the believing, I'd like to know?"

And there I stood, feeling as if I hadn't been invited, and not minding it in the least.

Tomais was right. War had not been any gentler with our lad than any of the thousand others invalided home. But he looked mortal good to us, for all he was gaunt and worn as famine itself; and wrapped up in enough bandaging to do an Egyptian mummy. After the first gladness was over and a lot of foolishness had stumbled off our

tongues, he said to Doctor Danny, a dry whimsy in his voice:

"Seeing that I'll have to be putting up with your doctoring, whether I like it or not, I'll be choosing my own nurses. Is that a bargain now?"

"'Tis a bargain if ye force it on me."

"Then I'll be taking the best two in Donegal—Nora Kelley for night shift and the lass, herself, for day." And his hand reached out sudden, like a body starving for bread, and took hers.

And I needn't be telling you he had his wish.

He was there a month; and every morning, from the time he woke till eight sharp, he'd forget there was a soul alive by the name of Nora Kelley. He'd just lie in his cot, looking at the door, while I made him ready to leave for the day. And at eight sharp in would come dancing Herself, looking, for all the world, as if Saint Peter had given her a day off from Paradise.

If my leaving him ever caused him any pain, he kept it to himself—like the brave lad he was; and by the same token, if my coming again at night was any way a treat, he covered his feelings with a fine, absent-minded manner. It would take an hour or two after the childeen had gone for him to unfasten his eyes from the door again; then he would chance on me with the tail of his eyes and say:

"Why, that's you, Nora Kelley, isn't it?" just as if he'd made a grand discovery.

"You must be finding the days very long," said I, sadly. "Naught to do but lie there and wish you could be about again doing a man's work. What do you find to do?"

"Do?" said he, looking at me oddly. "Oh yes—what do I find to do? Well—I manage to be fairly content, watching the women keep busy at their work. It's a grand thing, Nora Kelley, to see women about doing the work intended for them," and he slowly winked one eye at me.

"Faith, he's a terribly restless and contrary patient," I said to Herself next day. "It's a caution the things he wants, aye, and the way he'll keep a body trotting the long night, just as if it was a woman's place to nurse a man comfortable."

"Well, isn't it? Whose place would it be if not a woman's?" and Herself raised a pair of indignant eyebrows. "Besides, he's the most patient person in the hospital. I can't think what has come over you, Nora, calling him contrary. He never complains—he never thinks about himself at all; all day long he's planning things for the hospital and how to keep Doctor Danny from overworking."

"Well, why shouldn't he? Isn't Doctor Danny worth a whole bushel of lads like him? And why should he complain? Didn't he cut loose from the

field hospital and go gallivanting around the ditches without orders, and just naturally courting trouble? I'll wager a sixpence he's already planning how fast he can get back to it again."

She had no answer for that; but a hurt look came into her eyes that told me the thing I wanted to know.

That afternoon, Doctor Danny and myself threshed out the matter between us.

"It's this way, I'm thinking. He's given a year and several pounds of himself to fight for a country that he doesn't even belong to—it's pure foolishness to risk it again. He might better save himself now for them that has need of him."

"I know. Ever since the lad was given back to me I've been thinking out a way to keep him—to spare him for himself and—"

"Aye," I smiled, "meaning just that!"

Then he showed me two letters—one that had come while the lad was away, and the other the answer Doctor Danny had made to it.

"Those will not mend matters for you much," said I, giving the letters back to him. "You'll have to be giving him up the same."

"But in a different way. Ye didn't think, Nora Kelley, that I'd be harnessing the lad down to a life like this for always?" He looked off to the encircling hills he loved so well, and his eyes filled

with the memory of that love-promise—the greatest thing that had ever come into his life.

"For me it has been different. All I had was here; the work was mine to do. But life is calling to the lad from the world outside; for a year I have been harkening to its call and answering for him. 'Tis just a matter now of biding till he's stronger and—"

He didn't finish—what was the need? As it turned out, the biding wasn't long. Not many days after this I came in at my time at the hospital and found Herself sitting on the end of the cot, her two hands hidden under the lad's. There was peace and happiness aplenty written on the two faces. She was the first to look up at the door opening, but she never moved.

"We were waiting for you, Nora, waiting to tell you—"

"Was it anything to do with a wee wild rabbit?"

I laughed, for all the catch in my voice. She smiled back, dropping into the Irish herself.

"Aye, I'm thinking it was." Then her cheeks flushed pink and her chin was all aquiver in the old way.

"Ireland has brought me back everything, Nora, everything that you built into my life long ago. The other was just a shadow—a shadow

I tried to make real. It wasn't his fault, and I have no right to blame him for it or grow bitter because I had spent myself on a man I should never marry. But Himself understands all about it; and he thinks—he thinks—" She laid her cheek to the hands that covered hers, whispering the rest. "He thinks I have more to give just because of it."

"You've lost nothing, dearie, that's certain; and Himself is a wise lad."

I looked over at him and smiled solemnly. "And what might you want me to do with the letter now?"

"The letter?" Herself was filled with puzzlement.

He blushed in the little-lad way he had when things flustered him a bit.

"Oh yes, the letter. You might be burning it, I'm thinking."

"Burning it?" And the puzzlement grew on the childeen's face.

"You see," said Himself, holding her hands even closer, if such a thing were possible, "that I left a letter with Nora when I went away in case, just, I shouldn't be coming back—"

The childeen turned to me. "And you knew it, you knew all the time he cared—that day I was so afraid happiness would pass me by? Oh, Nora!"

And for the moment I didn't know whether she would laugh or cry.

"Maybe," said I, "that was how it came about I had so much philosophy concerning rabbits. And maybe"—I stooped and took her face between my hands—"maybe I was wanting you to learn the way of contentment without happiness before it came, so that with it there would be more contentment." Which sounded to me the most unsensible thing I'd ever said.

A week later, the lad was moved over to the house; and then it was that Doctor Danny showed the letters to Himself and Herself and told them his plans for their future.

What I had never known was that the lad had made a great name with his writings and his work on the white plague. He had worked out, with Doctor Danny, a system of diagnosing and treating that was the best any man in any country had offered yet. America had been crazy to get him over; and the letter was from one of the leading universities with a big medical and experimental side to it, that wanted him bad enough to make his going worth while, and Doctor Danny had sent the answer that he would come.

"But I'll not quit here; and, what's more, I'm going back to France as soon as I'm fit."

The lad spoke with a hint of his old-time strength.

"Then I'm saying ye are not!" boomed Doctor Danny, cured of those weeks of feebleness entirely. "To begin with, they'll not take ye—ye're not fit for service, and won't be as long as the war lasts. And how much operative work could ye do now with that stiff-jointed thumb?"

The lad looked down disheartened at the hand that had been shot through. He had worried a deal about the bad working of those fingers since the wound had healed.

"Now ye'll be listening to reason, and ye'll be thinking of the lass, along with other things. There's naught for ye here—naught that young folks like ye have a right to expect of life. The lad has served his apprenticeship and served it faithfully; and I would be seeing him take his place in the world outside—the place I might have filled myself and would be wishing my son to fill.

"As for the work here, there are a couple of upstart young doctors just finished in Dublin who need a little of their learning taken out of them. I'm not too old, I'm thinking, to try my hand at it again; and they'll take the burden of the practice from me — when the need comes."

The childeen was sitting on his knee and she slipped an arm about his shoulder, looking down steadily into his eyes.

"You're saying all this, and making believe about the work, just because—"

He pinched her cheek.

"Just because! Faith, that's the best reason in the wide world for doing anything. But mind ye, I'm not letting the lad go for good; the two of ye'll have to swear to a bargain before I let ye put foot out of Ireland."

He sat up straight and shook a stern finger at the two. "I'll only grant ye leave to go on the promise that ye'll spend the three months' vacation the university gives ye each year right here in Donegal. Then I'll break the lad into his old harness again and I'll take a vacation myself. The lass and Nora, and any other wee folk ye might take the notion to bring back with ye, will help me tend the roses and watch for the faeries to dance on the hill yonder."

That night I wrote a letter to the three back in America. I told them of the wedding that was coming, and of the places they were needing to fill at it. I made a postscript at the end, and it ran somewhat in this fashion:

You needn't be afeared of finding anything disquieting or sorrowful at your journey's end. Himself is a man after your

own liking, and he hasn't as much music in him as ye'd hear in a gander.

As for Herself—she's found the happiness that the four of us have watched her dream about since nursery days. You wouldn't miss seeing her now for a fortune, and taking the taste of that other memory out of your mouths for all time. I'm saying naught of your coming, but I'll be looking for you on the first boat over; and I'll not be ashamed to be showing you Ireland.

Respectfully yours,
N. KELLEY.

XII

AGAIN I REMEMBER THE WISE WOMAN OF LOUGH ERNE

HERSELF and Himself were married in the ivy-covered church at Donegal on the bravest day in August, with Doctor Danny, myself, and the three to witness them.

Mr. Paul had grown older, Little Hans looked more like a full moon, and he came laden, just, with pictures of the five children and tales of the Dutch Lady. According to him, babies and music were the best related professions you could be finding, and it did my heart good to be having him round again. Mr. Mayberry was the only one unchanged. Years seemed to take no toll of him.

Afterward, there was a gathering in Doctor Danny's garden, and the whole countryside came to wish the two good luck. I'm thinking there wasn't a cabin on any of the hills about that didn't manage at least one delegate; and many emptied

themselves of their families, starting at dawn and walking the whole of the way to get there in time.

Seumas Dubh came with his harp and sat under the ripening quicken tree, like a bard of old, playing one rare bit after another; every now and again laying a sudden hush on the laughing crowd —for there was no sadness in this day for a mortal soul, not even Doctor Danny.

At the hush times, I would catch Himself looking down at the wee white figure beside him as if he could not be believing the whole wonder of her. When you see that look in a man's face, a body need waste no fears for the wife and her happiness. It happened that we caught one of them between us, Paul Godfrey and myself, and I couldn't keep back the laugh at the wry face he made.

"But there's no sting in it this time," he whispered. "She's found a man that's a man—every inch of him—and I'd be a pretty poor sort if I couldn't be glad for them both, eh, Nora?"

It wasn't long after this that he borrowed a fiddle from some one and joined Black Jamie under the quicken tree. Then we had some gay, grand music: "Chruiskeen Lawn," "Rory O'More," "The Young May Moon," and a host of others; how he came to have the tunes by him is more

than I can tell. But I was glad he could be letting whatever sorrow he felt sink under, showing only his rare, fun-loving spirit.

As for the others—Little Hans and Mr. Mayberry were almost as popular as the bride. They took to the Irish like ducks to water; faith, they hadn't been the length of a day in Donegal before they knew half the town by name. At the wedding they saw to it that no one went hungry or lacked of good cheer.

"It's like old times—and yet it isn't," the childeen whispered to me as we were watching Mr. Mayberry, arm in arm with Paddy, the half-wit. "Daddy May is getting information from Paddy about the most likely time to be hearing the faeries' pipes; and Paddy's agreeing to have them all tuned up for him on Ben-Mor next May Eve, if he'll promise to come over. Oh!"

She turned to me quickly, her hands tight to her breast. "Nora darling, did any one ever have such a wedding before—such a day for the coming true of all her dreams? See! There they are, flocking back like Columkill's own birds, yonder, all white and dazzling in the sunlight."

Just then Himself and Little Hans joined us.

"What I want to know is where are the childher?" And Little Hans's smile spread like ripples on the bay. "I have been telling Himself that

never before have I known the childher to be out left from a festspiel."

The childeen laughed.

"I'm 'most ashamed to tell you where they are. They all came over in the bottom of my trunk—every one of them; but, somehow, I just couldn't take them out until to-day. This morning early, even before Nora was up, I sat them all up on my trunk and told them what was going to happen. Then I promised them if they would go back and stay like good childher, that when they got to their new home they should have—" She stopped suddenly and looked up, wistfully, at the lad.

"Aye, sure and they shall. We'll be after finding them the grandest lilac bush in America."

And he chuckled with the thinking of it.

It filled my heart with pride, while it kept the childeen's eyes brimming, to watch the people—my people that she had made hers—gather about her; and the wee gifts they had fetched to show their love for her as well as the lad.

Cassie Boyle, having saved up another sixpence, brought yards more of the fine crochet and slipped it into the childeen's hands with a look so full of worship I could have wept. She had walked the most of twenty miles to fetch it.

There was a pair of towels with lace edging from the cabin where the baby had the croup;

a collar of Carrickonacross made by the grannie of the lad with the smashed leg. And so it went —tea-cloths and towels, pillow-slips, lace and sprigged linen. Naught that had meant much spending, but loving labor.

The Sisters at Ballyshannon sent up a wee tea service of Belleek that looked as if it had been made out of thorn bloom. It was marked: "For Nora's wee lass—to use in the new house under the lilac bush."

They had remembered that day in the convent garden; and I wished I might have been sending back the look that came into the childeen's face after the reading, for the Sisters to be seeing.

Many had naught to bring but good wishes. "May the luck rise with ye and shadow ye the rest of your days," was one.

"May the two of ye never know blight, famine, or an empty cabin!" was another.

"May ye always bend your backs together, hand in hand, to the climb of the hill," whispered one old grannie. And Paddy, standing close by, added his wish: "And, sure, may ye be finding the faeries dancing for ye at the top!"

Every one shouted: "God's blessing on Doctor Danny's lad and the Wee Docthor!" While Black Jamie and Mr. Paul swung into "The Kerry Dancers," and played it with a great spirit. It

ended like the tale of the king's daughter, and as all good weddings should end:

"There were eatables and drinkables aplenty; and enough cakes left to fetch home to the childher. Himself had a kiss for the bride, and Herself had a kiss for the groom; and the neighbors had a dancing all round, and called them the handsomest, happiest couple in the county—since granda was a lad himself."

This all happened more than a year gone. The two sailed first; and I bided to help Doctor Danny over the time till the young doctors from Dublin should be broken in. I tried my best to believe, aye, and make Herself believe before she went, that she had no longer need of me and that my place now was in the old country.

But the look that came into her face hushed my tongue; and she laid the promise on me then for all time that I would never think or speak of such a thing again. So I sailed in the early fall—the three waiting for me; coming here to the big university and the new *dun* that held my dearie.

I had not been here a month before I was remembering the words of the Wise Woman of Lough Erne; and after letting them ring through my mind like the chiming of an old air, the wishfulness came over me to begin the tale.

Both Herself and Himself have made a great joking over it. Would I be reading it to them when it was done—and had I given them both a good character? Was I thinking of having it published, and would I put my own name to it? Such a slither of questions, you would think for the first time in history a nurse, just, had taken the notion to tell of her nursling.

"I hope it's not what the critics will be calling 'strong,' Nora darling," and the childeen slips into my lap and slaps my cheeks softly in the old, teasing way. I know she is remembering a certain day in Ireland and the things I once said to her.

"Never fear; no critic will lose sleep over this. There's no more to the tale than will rest easy on the end of a critic's nose; and if he ever reads it to the end he'll know he's been up to naught more exciting than spending an afternoon with an old woman, harkening to a memory tied to a loosened tongue, and tasting May wine and seed cookies by way of refreshment."

"I hope," says Himself, "that you're not forgetting in the glory of your own authorship to be mentioning the fact there's a seventh edition to the book Herself has written of Doctor Danny's people?"

"And I hope," says Herself, "that you haven't

forgotten to tell of the great man Doctor Danny's lad has come to be in America?"

"Which reminds me," and Himself tries hard to look as if he was caring little for her pride in him, "which reminds me that if we are going to get Doctor Danny over for the lectureship this winter it's time the letter was written."

We sit, the silence between us, the childeen still in my lap, while we listen to the lad's feet climbing the stairs to his study.

Herself is the first to raise the silence.

"You haven't left the faeries out for fear of scoffers, have you? And did you put in about the childher, and how Himself picked out this very house because it had a lilac bush in the garden with a robin's nest to rent? Did you, Nora?"

I nod my head. "There's but one thing I haven't put in—and that's not for want of remembering. I've saved it—the best for the last."

Herself looks puzzled for a minute, then she grows pink all over—the very pinkest of thorn bloom.

"Is it—"

Again I nod my head. "How do you think, now, we'd best put it?"

We lay the silence again while Herself sits very still, thinking hard. "You might begin by saying that you've had that christening-dress you made

for me out of its white paper and old lavender at least a dozen times in the last three days," and she looks at me with the old, teasing smile.

"And how did you come to find that out?"

"The same way I've found out how many minutes a day you are hanging over her crib—how many stitches a day you're knitting and sewing into dresses and socks—how many times a day you're thinking there never was such another baby. Oh, Nora darling, you're an old goose!"

At this I grow contrary.

"And isn't she? I'd leave it to any one in this country or Ireland if there's a bonnier wee bit of a baby to be found. If I put her in, shall I be after telling her name?"

"If you said she was named for two memories—the memories that sent two people bravely into the world to fill the lives of others—you wouldn't have to give her name. Every one would know it was Mary."

Again the silence, and again the childeen raises it.

"And I think if the book is published it ought to be dedicated to the foster-mothers the world over."

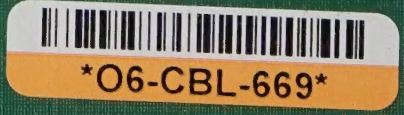
"And leave out the foster-fathers? Faith, where would you have been, dearie, if it hadn't been for the three and Doctor Danny? Tell me that!"

"I know—they counted a great, great deal. But

would I have had them if it hadn't been for you?" And Herself tosses her head—a sure sign that she's put in the last word.

And I know myself for the old goose she calls me. For the life of me I can't keep down the gladness that grips me whenever she says anything like that. But I try not to show too plainly all this foolishness. And again there is silence between us.

THE END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